



AFRICAN “MODERN”
ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACIES?
ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



Published in Portugal and Angola by
Sá da Costa & Chá de Caxinde,
Rua Serpa Pinto, 19, 1200-273 Lisbon, Portugal.



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Graphic conception and design:

Elsa Pereira

Cover:

Picture of part of the poster “Culture and Resistance:
Symposium and Festival”, Gaborone, 1982, by Medu Art Ensemble Collection.

ISBN:

978-989-33-5994-5

Funding:



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia



AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Partner institutions:

AAEA
Associação Angolana
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**In memory of
Luiz Araújo,
a freedom fighter
and a friend**

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INTRODUCTION





INTRODUCTION

Nuno de Fragoso Vidal*

Within a long historical tradition of authoritarianism, violence and autocratic rule, from the colonial period through the anti-colonial struggle and the so-called Socialist single party period, the political transition processes of the 1990s in Mozambique and Angola, came short of expectations in terms of promoting effective pluralism and democratization. Former single parties won elections and retained power, re-legitimizing (domestically and internationally) their autocratic and authoritarian governance and hegemony. With an outstanding capacity, these regimes and elites adapted their post-independence logics and power reproduction dynamics to the new multiparty electoral processes, subverting electoral integrity to their strategies and long-time hegemony projects (as exposed in the chapters of Nuno de Fragoso Vidal and Luca Bussoti in this book).

Ironically, elections and multipartyism of the last thirty years became structural and central to such political systems, be it for the parties in power (targeting to distort electoral integrity), be it for several opposition forces – some parties, individuals, part of civil society and international organisations (in struggle to preserve electoral integrity).

After more than thirty years of battles around electoral integrity we can easily perceive that the balance of forces clearly pended to the hegemonic forces in power. After 50 years of independence, MPLA and FRELIMO, and their long-time standing elites, still rule in their respective countries in an autocratic and authoritarian way that reproduces the colonial regime in so many aspects (as clearly exposed in the chapters of Malyn Newitt and Henning Melber in this book), acting consciously to distort electoral integrity and maintain their old project of hegemonic rule, now re-legitimized by more than 30 years of elections.

According to the partisans of effective pluralism and democratization, the consequences of such rule are blatant poverty and lack of human development. However, against that liberal democratic reasoning, came the new international

* Coordinator and Principal Investigator of the research project *Pluralism: Democratization and Electoral Integrity in Angola and Mozambique* (P-DEIAM), financed by the Foundation for Science and Technology – Ministry of Science and Technology of Portugal & the Aga Khan Development Network, within which this paper and book were produced.

wave of so-called “democratic illiberalism”, authoritarian and populist, which permeates the continent with growing attractiveness to the authoritarian and pro-hegemonic establishment. The attraction is for the new international legitimizing discourse (with powerful proponents at the international arena) supporting several of the procedures that numerous African regimes have been trying to camouflage under fake democracies since the 1990s, at the centre of which are myriad instruments to distort electoral integrity. The attraction is for a discourse and narrative (aiming to become an ideology of political pragmatism or utilitarianism, as exposed in Bruno Ferreira Costa’s chapter) that supposedly justifies the more-or-less violent offensives to legally constrain the independence of the judicial power, freedom of expression, of association, of individual rights and freedoms, including data privacy. Such offensives will obviously and once again end up distorting electoral integrity and re-re-legitimize the same old hegemonic pretensions of those in power with a new “ideologic” project and economic model that promises development through a so-called illiberal democracy and their “new” legal illiberal elections.

Meanwhile, in face of the increasing proximity between these regimes and their new role-models, like China, Russia and Turkey, among others, the West pledges and pressures for the virtues of liberal democratic values and norms effectively relaxed. As exposed by David Sogge’s and Bob van der Winden’s chapter, “Dependence on fossil fuels and their rents help account for the high degree of foreign official and corporate tolerance of ruling oligarchies in Angola and Mozambique, who are their reliable clients.”

In short, these are some of the issues discussed in this book, leaving several open reflections for these countries’ political, social and economic future.

A final word to say that this book comes in sequence of several scientific outputs produced within the research project on *Pluralism – Democratization and Electoral Integrity in Angola and Mozambique* – P-DEIAM (www.deiam.com), articulating three academic institutions – ISCTE-IUL, Angolan Catholic University and University Eduardo Mondlane –, developed between 2018 and 2023, funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology of the Portuguese Ministry for Science, Technology and Higher Education (FCT-MCTES) and the *Aga Khan Development Network*, within the program on *Knowledge for Development Initiative*.

This specific project is also part of the fourth stage of a larger project initiated in 2004 by Nuno de Fragoso Vidal and Justino Pinto de Andrade, entitled “Processes of Democratization and Development in Angola and Southern Africa”, created as an inclusive and participatory network of African, European and American academies, as well as myriad civil society organisations and international organisations alike, working on the central themes of the project, namely democratization and development.

From 2004 until today, in each and every thematic stage of the project, several outputs have been produced, including seven books, various articles in reviews, more than a dozen international conferences (e.g. Luanda, Maputo, London, Lisbon, Wageningen, Brussels – UN & EU), sponsored pannels at the Luso African Studies Organization in myriad conferences of the African Studies Association), provincial conferences (Huambo, Benguela, Lubango - Angola), besides innumerous workshops, public discussions, film and photography exhibitions on elections, etc. (www.pedeiam.com).

The ideas and arguments expressed in this book are the entire responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the position of any of the institutions involved in supporting this work and project.



ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE SURFING THE NEW INTERNATIONAL WAVE OF ILLIBERALISM

Nuno de Fragoso Vidal





ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE SURFING THE NEW INTERNATIONAL WAVE OF ILLIBERALISM

Nuno de Fragozo Vidal*

Introduction

Authoritarianism has a long path in contemporary African political history. The recent closer interaction and attraction between new international illiberal (populist and authoritarian) tendencies and several African countries, such as Angola and Mozambique, is just the latest development of authoritarianism and illiberalism within existing political structures that have evolved since independence. The novelty is how these newly developed illiberal practices and discourses at the international level are being adapted to the existing political systems according to their own needs and internal logics, to make these systems more efficient and effective according to a long-established domestic path. As happened with socialism and liberal capitalism in the post-independence period, or multiparty democracy and market economy in the 1990s transition period, we are again witnessing the creative adaptation and management of political features to serve existing domestic logics.

The re-emergence of global authoritarian or autocratic illiberal powers – mainly China and Russia – have been easily appropriated within the existing political systems in Angola and Mozambique, inverting the relative leverage of the West in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, this should not be seen as merely another local (African) opportunistic move for renewed sources of funding and loans, but as a possibility for the international re-legitimization and recycling of existing authoritarian and autocratic African political systems and regimes with the most recent illiberal techniques, tools, narratives and discourses, reducing the costs of camouflaging such regimes since the transition processes in the 1990s.

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This paper develops a critical approach to dominant political science discussions of so-called hybrid regimes, combining liberal and illiberal features, that use concepts such as illiberal democracies (Zakaria, 1997), façade democracies (Joseph, 2003), electoral autocracies (Schedler, 2006), semi-authoritarian states (Ottaway, 2003), competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2010), post-neoliberal states (Pitcher, 2017), control-focused democracies (Lauth and Schlenkrich, 2018), or new competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2020).

Such approaches are not equally useful across myriad contexts in several sub-Saharan polities, insofar as they start from an outward perspective, taking the liberal democracy analytical model and historical dynamics as their reference point, and assessing African political systems based on how much and how well they are able to assimilate the external role model. What is assessed is the degree of efficiency and effectiveness of the external leverage, linkage and agency upon those political systems, as if those systems were mainly subjects, followers or victims, essentially reacting to foreign stimulus, influences and pressures. Such approaches fit within a long European tradition of historical thought, according to which the dominant leverage and agency in Africa always came from abroad.

The paper progresses chronologically through three major transformations of post-colonial political systems, examining key international political trends and models in different historical moments. Section I deals with post-independence political dynamics in the face of socialist and liberal democratic models during the Cold War, followed by restructuring through the 1990s, during the so-called transition period. Section II articulates the interactions with the recent international tendencies of illiberalism. Mozambique and Angola are used as case studies to illustrate the adaptive use of international trends to internal political logics, rather than the other way around.

Section I – Political structuring in the post-independence period: from single-party regimes to the 1990s transition

Coming from different degrees of authoritarian illiberal colonial pasts, most authoritarian single-party regimes that progressively emerged after independence, whether so-called socialist or capitalist, civilian or military, evolved to have some or most of the characteristics of what has been characterized by an extensive literature as neo-patrimonial political systems, cocooning a patrimonial logic inside an apparently modern state bureaucracy.¹

It is important to note that the characterization of such a patrimonial matrix in these systems is analytically useful as long as it acknowledges the limits for generalization, that would lead to oversimplification, and insofar as it is understood from within its context. Ignoring these limits, several approaches on African political economy have used a slippery combination of functionalist and culturalist views to simplistically explain all the shortcomings of African economies using a so-called neo-patrimonial state paradigm. These evolved into an all-fit typology and teleological explanation for Africa that blamed this neo-patrimonial pattern for the distortion of the modern bureaucratic

¹ This is a vast literature and well-explained pattern of political-economic functioning that cannot be detailed here; for more details, see Médard, 1982; Bayart, 1989; Médard, 1991; 1992; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Bayart, MBembe and Toulabor, 1992.

developmental state (whether socialist or liberal capitalist); approaches which have been justifiably criticised (Mkandawire, 2015). Such approaches distort the original thinking on neo-patrimonialism, which was around an internal understanding according to context and not an outward perspective, as these simpler versions imply, to explain how the existing systems would be merely faulty replicas of foreign models.

In general, the administrative structures of these systems were built on top of the administrative structures of the colonial state, which were authoritarian, violent, and served the purpose of value extraction to the metropolis and metropolitan interests, instead of serving the common good of the administered colonial societies. Contrary to classic Marxist analysis, but in Marxist terms, an administrative superstructure preceded and determined the economic infrastructure, controlling access to resources and allowing them to benefit socioeconomically – a pattern and sequence that was replicated following independence.

Once the elites leading the nationalist movements and independentist parties – usually the most scholarly who had prepared within the colonial system itself and then mastered the political discourses of modernity – had appropriated the administrative colonial structure, they could either destroy it through some revolutionary process or adapt and reform. In general, sooner or later, and even in so-called socialist states, the reformist-pragmatic path prevailed. This was sometimes also called the “Monrovia group” perspective as opposed to the “Casablanca group”, which had a more revolutionary approach.

Within a polarized world during the Cold War, such a pragmatic perspective progressively invented its own *modus operandi*, reforming administrative structures according to a more modern format (the developmental state) with all its ancillary organizations, while subordinating them to the patrimonial ways of working. This led to a new form of patrimonialism, despite any official socialist or capitalist labels applied to the state. Power came to be exercised through the distribution of state resources according to preferential primary solidarities (e.g. family, ethno-linguistic, regional, spiritual, military ties, etc.) with appointments for top jobs in the state administration that had direct access to such resources, appropriated through patron-client channels of political-economic dependency.

The vulnerability and competence of such systems varied, according to their available economic resources and geo-strategic negotiating capability within the Cold War context. However, when faced with decreasing revenues due to the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, in general, the ‘ruled’ at the margins of the distributive system lost a good part of their initial slice of the cake and some of these systems came under stress (especially those without a permanent and significant source of foreign exchange, such as oil or other internationally valuable mineral exports). The natural distributive imbalance between ruling elites and ruled masses was aggravated and patrimonialism became increasingly elitist, and consequently increasingly authoritarian and repressive.

A shared experience of rising authoritarianism, chronic civil and political violence, and conflict throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, along with the economic decline associated not only with these systems’ *modus operandi*, but also the international context of oil shocks in the 1970s and debt crisis in the 1980s, presented common challenges that contributed to a similar structuring and pattern of such political systems.

In the face of the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) and the liberal offensive of the 1990s, these systems had to adapt. The dynamic and volatile essence of politics in general (and of political transitions in the 1990s in particular), ended up obfuscating a simple historical truth: that there is always resilience in the structural characteristics of previous models that still endure in concomitance with features of new models being implemented (Plattner, 2004). This happened through the transition from colonialism to independence, and again through the transitions of the 1990s. Political elites in Africa were usually the same before, during and after the 1990s transitions (and during and after colonization).

Without engaging with the ongoing discussions on the naivety of Western optimism in the 1990s on liberal democracy and the free market (Fukuyama, 2004), and the usefulness of the so-called transition paradigm (Carothers, 2002), it is nevertheless certain that the liberal democracy model gained ascendancy and had an impact on the Western international security and development agenda, as can be seen in strategic documents such as the UN Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals. It was generally seen as the desirable form of governance, expected to promote social justice and social equity, pluralism and accountability, therefore appeasing social conflict and promoting peace through the protection of individual rights and freedoms (Hegre et al., 2020; Plattner, 2019; Dahl, 1989, 1998).

At the political level, within the dynamic complex of variables and expected outcomes associated with liberal democratization, multiparty free elections were selected as the cornerstone institution to set the process in motion, becoming a priority in Western agendas (Piccone and Youngs, 2006; Carothers, 1999; Guilhot, 2005; Finkel et al., 2007; Tierney et al., 2011; Calingaert et al., 2014).

Consequently, the endeavours of African neo-patrimonial regimes to distort democratic processes targeted electoral integrity throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Electoral manipulation – with myriad and ever-evolving techniques, combined with different violent and non-violent instruments according to context – became widespread. Well-established authoritarian traditions resisted change, rendering void the protection of individual and minority freedoms (Brosche et al., 2020; Borzyskowski and Kuhn, 2020; Birch et al., 2020; Asunka et al., 2019; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018; Agbiboa, 2018; Garnett and Zavadskaya, 2017; Bekoe, 2012).

Given the argument that certain features resist and adapt transition, this was more the features and logic of the previous model resisting and adapting, than a rollback (Diamond, 2008; Merkel, 2010), or new formal features such as a presidential or a parliamentary structure malfunctioning (Kapstein and Converse, 2008). In the end, a clear rupture with neo-patrimonialism was the main requirement for any effective transition (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997).

At the economic level, liberalization was supposed to allow for free initiative beyond state and party control, thus opening up opportunities for social betterment through meritocracy and private initiative and hopefully contributing to destroying the dominant clientele-rentier logic and state patronage. Most of the donor strategies of major financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF, focused on privatization, followed by the legalization of the informal sector, and structural adjustment and poverty reduction strategies (PRSP).

Again, the results were not as expected. In most cases, the privatization processes were politically distorted to favour the existing ruling elites, with state assets acquired at symbolic prices by members of the party or government, who then became the new entrepreneurs, but still counted on the political-economic protection and privilege of the 'new liberal' state.

Moreover, such processes occurred within an international context of an unprecedented globalization of financial markets and world economy in the 1990s, which added to the recycling efforts of African neo-patrimonial economic systems in two major phases.

The first, up to the early 2000s, was the cruder articulation. Revenues from misappropriated public resources and of all kinds of illicit and illegal trade were increasingly diverted to newly expanded money-laundering channels, enabled by the poor regulation of the international markets. The phenomena of state deinstitutionalization in different degrees of intensity came to be known as the criminalization of the state in Africa (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou, 1999; Reno, 1995), warlordism (Reno, 1998), or in more general terms as Somalisation, narco states or failed/fragile states.

In the second phase, especially after the September 11 terrorist attacks and the increasing fear that more fragile states could support international terrorism, a process of state re-institutionalization came to the fore, implemented by major donors and international organizations. Much technical support was provided, along with aid channelled through ministries and state budgets, with hundreds of appointed specialists, advisors and consultants imbedded in the most influential ministries. These political systems effectively benefitted from such re-institutionalization, upgrading their technical, legal and bureaucratic competence, but once again not exactly in the way expected by its international promoters.

In this second phase, the acquired competence and knowledge of international global financial markets at the upper, 'legal', level, allowed for a more sophisticated and 'legitimate' engagement of those who controlled the state with the international financial system. Neo-patrimonialism again reinvented itself and expanded into what I call post-modern patrimonialism, characterized by a complex international financial dimension, whereby various interrelated public/private, African/foreign, and clientelistic networks, became more effective in their appropriation of State resources, and maintaining their power and unaccountability to the public. Such new dimension will more recently find an important discursive ally – the new international authoritarian populist "democratic" illiberalism.

This new dimension only began to be revealed in recent years, through major international financial scandals. Among other possible examples (including Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Congo, to mention but a few), the cases of Mozambique and Angola are among the most recent and revealing. These are examples of countries under constant international pressure and interference since independence, and therefore represent extreme situations to test our argument of the adaptative and ingenious use of international trends to feed internal political logics, rather of the other way around.

Mozambique

In the fall of 2016, after years of dizzying economic growth since the mid-1990s and being seen as a positive example in Africa, a scandal was uncovered in Mozambique, to the shock of the IMF, World Bank, and the donor community at large.

It became publicly known that a few state companies, with state guarantees in 2013 and 2014, had managed to raise more than \$2 billion on the international markets (mainly arranged by Credit Suisse and Russian VTB) and hide this debt from official state accounts. One of the companies involved (Ematum) went as far as issuing \$850 million Eurobonds in public ‘secret’ debt. The project’s benefits never materialised and hundreds of millions of dollars vanished. An inability to pay the debt forced the government to default in 2017, admitting that its debt levels (until then secret) were unsustainable (CIP, 2021). The scandal unravelled layers of misappropriation of public funds within the ruling party, government and state, and raised the possibility of a wider financial crisis in poor countries that could cause a ‘financial shockwave’ (Quinn, 2016). The US authorities accused the whole project of being a façade for bribery and kickback schemes, but amidst all this, the Mozambican government still did not disclose all of the borrowing. Donors, who had provided about a quarter of the country’s budget for almost 25 years, suspended financial assistance and demanded a full investigation of the secret loans and missing funds (The Economist, 2019; Aris, 2019).

The shock centred on the fact that the government was able to conceal such a major international financial scheme with public debts and involving large international banking institutions since 2013. This happened in a country where international partners and institutions had been closely involved in government and civil society affairs since the 1990s, with appointed specialists, advisors and consultants imbedded in the most influential ministries, working daily with key ministers. The national budget and public accounts were supposedly closely monitored by the international community and civil society organizations (with internationally funded structures for such a watchdog role).

Suddenly, the reality was that poverty remained a fact of life for the great majority of the population (Shipley, 2019; Gerety, 2018) and the transition from a supposed socialist regime to a multiparty democracy in 1992 (ending a 15-year civil war that ran from 1977 to 1992), was, after all, a long road of adaptation. The ruling party (FRELIMO – Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) and its elites, in power since independence in 1975, were able to divert international leverage on political and economic liberalization in its favour.

FRELIMO manipulated privatization processes in the 1990s in favour of the old elites, maintaining all significant private and public business sectors under the usual political dependency. In parallel, the party’s control of the state apparatus (administration, logistics, executive, legislative, judicial and economic) meant that it was able to renew its electoral legitimacy, winning each multiparty election since the transition started, from presidential and legislative (1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019) to municipal (1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, and 2018). Overwhelming electoral victories allowed FRELIMO to legislate as it pleased, including on a new ‘made-to-fit’ constitution in 2004 that was revised in 2007. Although electoral results have been contested since 1994, with serious accusations and evidence of electoral malpractice and fraud, a politically compromised judicial system repeatedly and swiftly discarded all complaints (Nvunga, 2014; Rosário,

2016; Rosário and Muendane, 2016; Cahen, 2020; Hanlon, 2021; 2021a; 2015).

With three different elected presidents respecting two-term mandates after the transition (Joaquim Chissano, Armando Guebuza and Filipe Nyusi), and new business opportunities for major international players, an illusion was created that a multiparty liberal democracy was in progress, with an accountable government committed to tackling poverty, promoting development and cooperating with the international community within a liberal context of globalization.

With the debt scandal, the mask fell and revealed that the increased competence of the government, from the early 2000s onwards, essentially served to strengthen and expand the existing neo-patrimonial system into a new, sophisticated and even more unaccountable dimension, here termed post-modern patrimonialism.

The loan scandal in Mozambique was partly framed by the party in power as the politics under Guebuza, while trying to portray Nyusi as a reformist fighting the system; but the 2019 general election and all the electoral malpractices revealed up to that point cast serious doubts on the scope and effectiveness of such reforms on the Mozambican political economy and political system (Hanlon 2021; 2021a).

Angola

In contrast to Mozambique, the Angolan government has always had relative leverage over international governmental and non-governmental organizations due to fierce foreign competition for a stake in the lucrative oil business, but technical support from the IMF, World Bank, EU, and myriad bilateral cooperation partners, was also embraced in the late 1990s. Moreover, hundreds of international consultancy companies were hired to support the design and implementation of projects and day-to-day management of state institutions, beyond the oil sector (Soares de Oliveira, 2015).

As in Mozambique, the party in power since independence in 1975 – the MPLA – reinforced its strength at all levels through the 1990s transition. It was able to undertake privatization that merely distributed state assets to the same elites in power, maintaining the public and private sectors under tight political control. Partisan control of the state apparatus – administrative, logistics, media, executive, legislative and judicial – alongside record-high economic growth rates up to 2013/14 (from the oil bonanza of 2002 to 2014), were reflected in three consecutive electoral victories with more than two-thirds of the votes in each plebiscite since the end of the civil war (2008, 2012, and 2017). The government regularly announced supposed significant reductions in poverty, while investors looked at the country as the new rising “El Dorado” economy in Africa (Soares de Oliveira, 2015; Fernandes, 2015).

The record-high oil revenues even prompted an ambitious internationalization of Angolan (elite) capital, heavily invested in Portuguese strategic sectors such as banks, communications, energy, media and insurance. However, the steady decrease in oil prices since 2014 – with oil still representing one-third of GDP and over 95% of the government’s exports (World Bank, 2020) – eventually revealed that the essential structures of the political-economic system remained.

As in Mozambique, major financial scandals with complex international ramifications erupted in 2017 and have continued since then. The new administration of President João Lourenço – elected in September 2017 as the ruling party’s chosen successor to José Eduardo dos Santos following 38 years of his presidency – assumed “a looted State with empty coffers” as Lourenço himself complained (Costa, 2018; *Jornal de Angola*, 2018). The financial hole reinforced his electoral campaign promises to fight corruption, attempting to recover part of the looted funds, estimated in October 2020 at \$24 billion, but officially expected to be much higher. According to Lourenço, it had already been confirmed that the bulk of looting was through fraudulent contracts with the state-owned oil company, Sonangol (\$13.52 billion), alongside illegal withdrawals from government-run diamond companies Sodiam and Endiama (\$5.09 billion), and other sectors and public companies (\$5.19 billion) (Keeler, 2020).

Although at a much higher financial level (due to the amounts involved coming from oil revenues) than in Mozambique, the cases revealed the increasing technical competence, international dimension, sophistication and complexity of neo-patrimonial management, orchestrated by the top members of the state, party and military structures, including the former president’s family, supported by international consultants hired from all over the world.

The son of the former president, José Filomeno dos Santos, former head of Angola’s \$500bn Wealth Sovereign Fund (WSF), was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison in August 2020 for fraud, misappropriation of funds and money laundering. The case involved a 2017 transaction (in the final weeks of his father’s rule) diverting \$500 million from the central bank in a scheme that planned to skim off \$1.5 billion from the WSF (Steinhauser, 2020).

Meanwhile, at the same time as the government was trying to negotiate a new loan of around \$1 billion with the IMF in 2020, a leak revealed that in 2018 a Swiss court had frozen around \$1.1 billion in private accounts held by a former cadre of the state oil company – São Vicente and his wife Irene Neto, the son-in-law and daughter of the first president, Agostinho Neto. The new scandal was related to the concession of a government monopoly on insurance in the oil sector to a company created by Sonangol, the AAA insurance, bypassing the usual Angolan state insurance company to the oil sector (ENSA). Sonangol held almost all the AAA, but progressively and discreetly transferred its ownership over the years to São Vicente’s companies in the Bahamas. Without any proper compensation or legal explanation, except the usual distributive patronage networking, Sonangol held a mere 10% in 2012, while São Vicente assumed 90%. Meanwhile, from 2012 to 2017, AAA more than doubled insurance prices and is estimated to have made around \$2.5 billion net profit in that five-year period (Oliveira, 2020).

Such new and sophisticate engineering of the Angolan neo-patrimonial system from 2000 onwards is also allegedly the basis of one of the biggest cases of state resource misappropriation, involving the former president’s daughter, Isabel dos Santos (and her late husband Sindika Dokolo), considered by *Forbes* in 2013 to be the richest woman in Africa. Their vast international corporative empire ranges from the national and international oil sector, to banking, diamonds, TV, internet, and land and mobile phone companies in Angola and Portugal. Some of their assets and companies, worth billions,

are being frozen and/or reclaimed by the Angolan government through judicial processes in Angola and abroad, revealing extremely complex international financial operations and networks of offshore indirect participation in myriad companies and dozens of countries. According to public prosecutors, their businesses were all allegedly acquired with state funds through political influence and protection from the presidency, and initially using Sonangol money (BBC Panorama Team, 2020).

The new financial-economic engineering not only made the existing patrimonialism more effective, with assets and amounts appropriated at a scale never seen before, but more importantly, managed to make it much more efficient, enabling it to internationally launder looted funds in a much 'cleaner' and more sophisticated way (see chapter of Sogge and Winden in this book) than the traditional straightforward diversion of state money to foreign accounts that was usual in the 1990s.

The same elites that were hardly struggling in the 1990s to capitalize their newly acquired assets (through privatization) and learn how to become entrepreneurs in the new market economy, finally managed to rise to international 'legitimate' business class status in the globalized economy. Through the new scheme, they entered the capital of reputable international companies, some owned in part by the states of targeted countries, therefore making respectable indirect accomplices abroad. For example, Isabel dos Santos and her late husband became partners of the Portuguese state in the most important Portuguese oil company (Galp Energy), as well as majority partners in Portuguese banks (BIC), telecommunication companies (NOS), and the largest Portuguese multinational corporation energy and engineering (Efacec), as well as being involved in several other companies in different countries.

Again, as with Mozambique, on assuming the presidency, the new president tried to portray himself as a reformist, committed to tackle corruption and introduce a new era, and blamed the tail end of the Dos Santos era for the more entrenched and uncontrolled assault on the state coffers. However, after its first term in office, the so-called fight against corruption by the new Lourenço administration revealed itself as highly selective, unmercifully chasing a few for the media spotlight, such as the former president's family, while sparing (sometimes explicitly protecting, against all evidence of corruption) innumerable tycoons intimately related to the previous administration. Most of these tycoons simply continued within the new administration.

The Lourenço administration is therefore composed of members of the established elites, including the new president, a long-time top-rank member of the state, party and military structures, as well as his wife (former minister and deputy-minister of planning for 15 years in the previous Dos Santos administration).

These scandals in Angola and Mozambique (and several others reported over the last decade) reveal the qualitative and quantitative transformation of the existing patrimonial political management system, through international expansion and sophistication. These systems are no longer the result of powerful authoritarian "Big men" freelancing and undertaking crude day-to-day management of state looting (Mobutu-style) through underground financial parallel markets (traffickers), which characterized the 1990s.

After almost three decades of transition, African patrimonial political systems, in different shades and shapes, have become much more complex and sophisticated at the central and local levels, with significant international ramifications, and effectively defused and systemically concealed forms of dominance and authoritarianism (Birch et al., 2020: 3-14; Soderberg, 2018; Soderberg and Bjarnesen, 2018).

More than 45 years after independence, MPLA and FRELIMO, and their long-standing elites, still rule in their respective countries and act consciously and strategically to maintain that power. Both parties have managed to control most of the variables around electoral processes since the transition started in the 1990s. In Angola, elections in different contexts (1992, 2008, 2012, 2017, and 2022) have reaffirmed the MPLA's hegemony in the multiparty era, reaching a two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats from 2008 to 2017 (in 2022 the victory was 51.17%), having altered the constitution at will in 2010. In Mozambique, multiparty presidential, legislative, and municipal elections, have also resulted in consecutive victories for the party in power since 1975, winning with large majorities of the votes.

Regimes in both countries cannot be considered liberal democracies. However, notions of illiberal democracies (Zakaria, 1997), façade democracies (Joseph, 2003), electoral autocracies (Schedler, 2006), semi-authoritarian states (Ottaway, 2003), competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2010), post-neoliberal states (Pitcher, 2017), control-focused democracies (Lauth and Schlenkrich, 2018), or ‘new’ competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way, 2020) are not adequate either.

Such categorizations approach these systems and their regimes' dynamics from an external analytical perspective of the influence of the liberal democracy model: aiming to know how much the liberal democratic waves of the last decades have managed to effectively penetrate or be assimilated by these systems, or to what degree the push towards liberal democracy was effective, and in what contexts and circumstances. For instance, Levitsky and Way explain this process in terms of levels of intensity of Western linkage and leverage, and external and domestic democratizing pressure related to favourable or unfavourable domestic conditions for democracy (2010: 236-308).

In all those analytical frameworks, like in many other previous political analyses on Africa, the major agency lies with external political-economic forces and influences.

For our argument, it must be emphasized that such dynamics within these systems have not been a merely defensive and reactive process by whatever authoritarian means possible, as those theoretical approaches imply. The adoption of liberal democratic characteristics (although several were imposed from outside with conditionalities attached) has been successfully selective, while distorting, subverting, taming, domesticating and subordinating them to the existing and dominating working system, in order to make it more efficient and effective in its main purpose and *modus operandi* – to serve the private misappropriation of public funds, pursuing political legitimization through patronage networks, and sustaining elites' hold on power, their reproduction and the maintenance of the status quo.

Section II – African political systems and the attraction for the new international illiberal wave

After the 2008 financial crisis, the global context changed significantly. Overtly proud, illiberal ideologies rose in Europe and elsewhere, the most cited example being the 2014 speech of Hungary's prime minister Victor Orbán, referring to the economic success of illiberal democracies such as China, Russia and Turkey (Orbán, 2014). The rise of populism in Europe and elsewhere, not only in countries without a liberal tradition but also in long-established Western liberal democracies, shattered the 1990s liberal consensus.

For the previously expounded liberal democracy analytical perspectives, this meant declining Western linkage and leverage, with the West cooling its interest in promoting worldwide democracy given the financial and political crisis. Added to this, the emergence of global alternative sources of military, economic, and diplomatic support – mainly China and Russia – significantly reduced the external cost of authoritarianism. This led to the spread of new competitive authoritarianism, structurally grounded on populism and elections through several distortions of liberal democracy and electoral integrity, tilting the political playing field (Levitsky and Way, 2020). According to Levitsky and Way, in much of sub-Saharan Africa, the state and party weakness facilitated the implementation or persistence of competitive authoritarianism instead of dictatorship, meaning that “state weakness has inhibited authoritarian consolidation in the post–post–Cold War era” (2020: 59).

In simple terms, the persistence or recrudescence of competitive authoritarianism – although the Western liberal hegemony of the 1990s, which led many full autocracies to become competitive authoritarian, has waned – is again explained through the back and forth dynamics of major external political tides. According to these authors, such systems would stick to competitive authoritarianism instead of going back to straightforward dictatorial hegemony because they have little alternative due to their weak effectiveness as states (Levitsky and Way, 2020: 57–58).

Again, there is no explanation why the previous liberal democratic penetration left no other durable or significant structural traits or marks whatsoever, besides tilted electoral processes. Could it be because there was a system in place, strong enough to rebuff the liberal democratic features that effectively threatened it, while adopting or distorting the others that did not?

Such analyses lack an internal view, taking into account sub-Saharan African political systems' own logics, dynamics and agency, in terms of the strategy followed to relate to the new international context in ways that best serve its own purposes. How then is the re-emergence of global authoritarian or autocratic powers – mainly China and Russia – articulated within the existing political systems of a patrimonial matrix in sub-Saharan Africa?

Seen from the perspective of those two major international stakeholders in the continent, the picture is clear. Russia is attempting to recover its status as a major geo-strategic player in Africa, rebuilding on ties from Soviet times and making Africa one of its foreign economic policy priorities. This was formalized at the Russia–Africa summit at Sochi in October 2019. Russia is already the biggest arms supplier in the continent, with military

cooperation increasing since 2015, and economic interests ranging from natural resources to energy, including nuclear (Putin, 2019; BBC, 2020; Schmitt and Gibbons-Neff, 2020). Concomitantly, China has been a major player in Africa since the early 2000s, is currently the continent’s biggest trading partner, dominating infrastructure development with its all-encompassing strategy (the Belt and Road Initiative) and is also increasing its share of arms exports to the continent (to 13% of all African arms imports in 2020). Moreover, it started defying traditional Western institutions as the World Bank and IMF by lending and cooperating on competitive financial terms, without the usual Western liberal democratic conditions attached (Dollar, 2019; Horn et al., 2019; Li, 2017).

From the perspective of the existing political systems, Mozambique and Angola are good examples of how such dynamics have been selectively adapted to internal logics and structures, especially in terms of the appeal of the supposed new international legitimization of reformulated authoritarianism.

In Mozambique, Chinese loans became central to help absorb the financial and political impact of the debt scandal. Although they started earlier, Chinese loans have accelerated since donors suspended financial assistance in 2016 after the scandal was revealed. Mozambique’s renewed importance to China’s Belt and Road Initiative has provided the government with a raft of preferential loans and direct investment from Chinese state and private companies. Mozambique’s debt to China has steadily increased from \$50 million in 2007 to \$2.4 billion in 2018, representing 20.2% of its total foreign debt and 13.2% of GDP in 2019, with China currently the biggest largest creditor and the main beneficiary of debt servicing (Brautigam et al., 2020). Independent organizations have complained about the lack of transparency around these loans in national budget documents, drawing parallels with the hidden debt scandal (Harnack et al., 2020).

For Russia, the close relationship of the Soviet era slowed down in the 1990s, but regained strength in recent years, with Russia positioning itself to take a stake at the increasingly important Mozambique gas sector. The new projects to exploit massive offshore natural gas deposits in Cabo Delgado are among Africa’s three largest projects, expected to produce 20 million tons of LNG per year. Although Mozambique’s president was not at Sochi, as the summit coincided with national elections, he attended a Russian–Mozambican business forum a couple of months earlier to sign several agreements in the areas of energy, oil and gas, politically and economically signalling the country’s alignment.

The mounting Western fears around Chinese and now Russian ambitions towards the continent, and the increased importance of Mozambique’s offshore natural gas deposits, were confidently handled by the Mozambican government in the face of external pressures on transparency, accountability, liberal rights and freedoms. The government has regularly touted its bilateral cooperation, praising Chinese aid and investment (Baker, 2019), and Western donors quickly understood that their traditional leverage was decreasing. It is not so much the West diminishing its interest in promoting worldwide democracy given its own problems, but that the leverage was transposed.

Angola provides an even clearer example of such dynamics. Needing a major reconstruction plan after 27 years of civil war that ended in 2002, the government sought funding through an international donors’ conference, including the IMF and World Bank, which immediately attached several conditions in terms of transparency, accountability, human

rights and civil liberties. Faced with such conditionality, the government found a way out in 2003, with China willing to fund the country's reconstruction with oil-backed loans, free from any conditionalities and with better financial conditions than the IMF. With the new partnership and oil revenues, the government felt sufficiently comfortable by 2004 to simply give up on the donors' conference.

Chinese loans substantially increased, and Angola became the top recipient of Chinese loans in Africa with more than \$43.2 billion from 2002 to 2018 (of a total of \$145.56 billion of Chinese loans in Africa), which peaked in 2016 at \$19.3 billion, prior to 2017 elections. Of the \$43.2 billion, \$10 billion was simply to recapitalize Sonangol (Brautigam et al., 2020), the oil company at the centre of the looting scandals.

The Chinese connection went beyond this, and when President João Lourenço rose to power in 2017, he assumed that he would be seen as Angola's Deng Xiao Ping rather than its Michael Gorbachev, as evidenced by the references permeating the new president's political plans (Diário de Notícias, 2017).

As with FRELIMO, the MPLA's close relationship with Russia goes back to Soviet times, peaking in the 1970s and 1980s during the civil war, and regaining impetus in 2015. Since then, Angola has become the third-largest African client for Russian arms (Deutsche Welle, 2020). Russia has also been increasing its long-time presence in the mining and energy sectors, and Angola (along with Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia) was among the group of countries visited by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in March 2018 in the run-up to the Sochi summit. By then, according to Lavrov, "our African friends note the need for Russia's active presence in the region, and more frequently express interest in holding a Russia–African summit" (Klomegah, 2020: 27).

African postmodern patrimonial systems quickly saw the opportunities opened by the new international trend of authoritarian populism. However, this was not so much in the more obvious terms of renewed sources of aid and investment, but mainly in terms of political legitimating discourses to escape not only the decades-long Western criticism and pressure for liberalization, but also to deal in more effective and efficient terms with growing domestic demands and activism for democratization, that do exist despite postmodern patrimonial reinforcement.

The attraction does not seem to be the adoption of a new model of authoritarianism, replacing a patrimonial matrix with Chinese-style totalitarianism or some form of Russian autocracy. First, because it would hardly be feasible, if at all. Russian and Chinese regimes are based on strong hierarchical bureaucracies and well-organized and disciplined parties, whereas African political systems are historically entrenched in different socio-cultural and economic contexts with different party dynamics and weak-functioning state and political management, pervaded with informality and patron-client legitimacy networks that hinder proper institutionalization. Second, the attraction of such 'new' models of authoritarian illiberalism is not ideological either, insofar as these illiberal experiments and discourses can be as disparate as Xi Jinping's "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and Orbán's Christian Illiberal Democracy (Plattner, 2019), which in either case would not mean much within a patrimonial matrix.

The attraction is for the international legitimization of several authoritarian procedures and mechanisms that are of great use to these regimes, rendering them more effective and efficient. This means, for instance, limiting individuals’ and minorities’ fundamental rights and freedoms in the name of a higher common good or project, to protect core values supposedly sustained by the leadership and supposedly supported by most of the population, as expressed in also supposedly ‘free and fair’ elections (effectively manipulated to favour the ruling party).

It includes the possibility of legally constraining or repressing fundamental rights and freedoms through sophisticate mechanisms, as in China and Russia; to increase state control over citizens through new technological means, ignoring privacy rights, also as in China and Russia; to constitutionally revoke the limits for leaders’ term mandates, as with Putin and Xi Jinping; to limit the independence of the judiciary and the media, as in Russia, Hungary and Turkey; to improve political control over the economy and over the rising fortunes that emerged politically protected and authorized, as in Russia and China. In other words, to continue creating an uneven playing field, with more sophisticate means and legitimizing discourse, contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system, ruling elites, and status quo.

It is the possibility to legitimize several of the procedures and mechanisms targeting liberal rights and freedoms that African patrimonial systems have been more crudely camouflaging since the 1990s. In Africa, this is the most recent reinforcement of existing postmodern patrimonial systems and not merely possible and desperate survival attempts by weak authoritarian states.

While these developments in such countries’ foreign policy are the most recent examples of their agency, one must not forget that even in the most stressful times of the Cold War, these countries were never simple subjects of the Eastern bloc. Angola’s elites learned through the Cold War how to avoid becoming pigeonholed, always cleverly playing the Cubans and Soviets while at the same time having Western companies leading the oil extraction in the country, and even initiating economic reform before the fall of the Berlin wall, with the so-called “financial and economic cleaning” programme of 1987 (*Saneamento Económico e Financeiro*). Mozambique rejected Comecon membership in 1981, and diversified its foreign policy from then on, evolving to today seeking multipolarity in its regional and international relations (e.g. with Rwanda and South Africa).

Conclusion

The first-generation African post-colonial regimes (whether officially labelled socialist or capitalist, civil or military) were not poor or rough local versions of their Western or Eastern counterparts. Neither were second-generation (so-called transition) African political systems faulty versions of liberal democracies, nor local adaptations into some kind of tropical democracies. Likewise, the current transformations that have resulted from interactions with new international illiberalism are also not aiming to replicate the dominant role models – Russia, China or Turkey.

A long-established body of political analysis has resisted accepting interpretations based on the ability of post-colonial patrimonial political systems in Africa to follow their

own logic, according to their own, historical, 'home-grown' experience, and according to their elites' agency, ability and political competence to coherently pursue their own objectives within their own political dynamics that have evolved since independence. This posture results in a refusal to accept that these regimes can be anything more than allies, followers, victims, or secondary participants in major foreign and international dominant dynamics and political models.

Nonetheless, besides any such value judgements, these logics, in myriad variations and dynamics since independence, in articulation with the world economy and international political trends in all their historical variations, have proven incredibly resilient and able to reinforce themselves, as clearly shown by the cases of Mozambique and Angola here, and several similar ones. To deny their existence, resilience and strength, is to prolong the Western inability to understand them and continue treating them as inferior replicas of other models, while leaving space for an increasingly efficient articulation with the new international trends of illiberalism on their own terms.

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MOZAMBIQUE AND ANGOLA – THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

Malyn Newitt





MOZAMBIQUE AND ANGOLA – THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

Malyn Newitt*

In 1999 Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz published *Africa Works*. In this book they looked at the prospects for African countries evolving towards what the West understood as liberal democracy. Having dismissed these hopes as illusory, they then set out to explain how and why politics in Africa – following the expectations and norms of neo-patrimonialism – operated in a wholly different way from politics in the West.

The desirability of democracy is in principle not to be denied, [but] an assessment of the prospects for greater democracy demands that we approach the task of explaining contemporary African politics from a different analytical angle (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: xvi).

Chabal and Daloz questioned whether the international aspirations and projects for African development were in accord with the realities of African political culture. During the relatively short colonial period in Africa which had lasted only from the 1890s to the 1960s there had been a recognition that Africa could not be isolated from what was happening in the rest of the world and an attempt was made to integrate Africa fully into the global economy, based on the cultural assumptions and values of the western liberal, capitalist world. This had largely failed, as the capitalist business model which the colonial powers employed, turned out to be purely exploitative and the last ten years of colonial rule, when government-directed development policies were adopted by all the colonial powers, was far too short to make any long-term impact. Nevertheless, when the African colonies became independent in the 1960s, it was assumed that Africans would attempt to follow the same objective of western-style development and modernisation. This also proved an illusion largely, as Chabal and Daloz pointed out, because the African ruling elites, although they sometimes paid lip service to western values, in fact established regimes based on patrimonialism and rent-seeking which were more securely rooted in African culture.

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The changing world order in the 1990s renewed the objective of aligning Africa with the values and practices of western democratic politics and economics, this time rooted in the ideas and programmes of the Washington Consensus. And once again these hopes and expectations proved illusory.

This chapter will examine the extent to which the story of Mozambique and Angola matches the analysis offered by Chabal and Daloz. It will reflect on the parallel experiences of Angola and Mozambique since their independence from Portugal in 1975. Although both countries have, in different ways, tried to break with their colonial past, they have found themselves adopting many of the ideas and political programmes which had characterised the colonial era. In this way, their present is rooted firmly in their recent and not so recent history.

The late colonial period

It is often assumed that, until the end of its colonial rule in Africa in 1975, Portugal did next to nothing to promote the social, economic and political development of its colonies. This was the narrative that was widely accepted during the nationalist wars of independence which broke out, initially in Angola, in 1961. However, this was certainly not the case and, as the colonial wars ground on throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, considerable changes in fact took place. The development plans that had been drawn up after the Second World War had led to major infrastructure projects, settlement schemes and the establishment of a wide range of consumer industries (Clarence-Smith, 1985; Newitt, 1995). Although European immigrants provided most of the skilled and semi-skilled workforce (Castello, 2007), considerable numbers of Africans were involved. The *indigenato* was formally abolished (though in many areas forced labour continued in practice) and education was expanded to help provide a literate workforce.

By the early 1970s, moves had also been made to establish independent budgets for the colonies and for security to be in part handed over to locally recruited forces.

The development policies of the later colonial period (for example the *colonatos*, railways and, above all, the dam projects) deeply influenced the policies and long term thinking of the regimes that took power after independence and help to explain the gap which was to open up between the populations of the colonies and the revolutionary leadership which took over when the Portuguese left (Isaacman, 2013).

Other aspects of the colonial legacy, it has been claimed, include “entrenched violent forms of political expression” and a “rigid form of bureaucracy that cast a large shadow over the postcolonial administration” (Chabal and Vidal, 2007, 3). David Birminham, writing particularly about Angola, went further. The government of Eduardo José dos Santos (who succeeded Agostinho Neto as president in 1979 and ruled Angola until he retired in 2017) was in many ways a reflection of the Portuguese regime it had replaced. Angola’s economy remained dependant on a single product – coffee in colonial times and oil in the twenty-first century. Moreover,

(...) politics in 2000 was as unresponsive to public opinion as it had been in 1970
 (...) Now as then the army kept an eye on political decision-making and had a
 finger in the economic pie (...) wealth was as sharply polarised as it had been in

late-colonial times (...) The colonial class of 200,000 privileged and semi-privileged expatriates had been replaced by a similar number of black Portuguese speaking Angolans (Birmingham, 2015: 118-19).

The Catholic church presided over the religion of the rulers as it had under Salazar. Moreover, the dictatorship established by dos Santos resembled a colonial regime where there had been no,

(...) administration by consent or trial by jury or participatory local government [which] were norms of an open society which the colonial powers had conspicuously failed to introduce into Africa (Birmingham, 2015: 118-19).

The depth and significance of the colonial legacy was fully understood by the new rulers and, in the case of Mozambique, the president, Samora Machel, was to emphasise again and again that Mozambique was not to be content with just being independent, with installing an African in the governor's palace, but had to free itself from the colonial legacy and create a new nation ruled over by 'new men'.

Revolutionary Leadership

The leadership of the revolutionary nationalist movements that took power in 1975 was drawn from an intellectual westernised elite, many of whose members had been exiles for many years.¹ These men had received their education abroad in Lisbon or Paris and were not very familiar with the people they aspired to govern, particularly the people in the interior.

In Angola the MPLA leadership was drawn from the Portuguese-speaking mestizo and creole families long settled in Luanda. This class had lost status during the years of white immigration and for them the nationalist movement offered a route back to enjoying the influence and economic advantages they had been used to in the past and thought of as their right (Marcum, 1969; Newitt, 2015; Oliveira, 2015: 6-7).

In Mozambique, the long-established creole families of Mozambique Island and the vast Zambezi heartlands had lost out when the capital was moved in 1902 to Lourenço Marques. The mestizos and *assimilados* of the new capital had less history behind them and less tradition of local self-government. Even so, the Frelimo leadership largely resembled that of MPLA and PAIGC and, like them, developed influential contacts in communist and liberal western countries. Mestizos, whites and even Goan Indians had a prominent role. In Mozambique the situation of the capital in the extreme south meant that many of the more prosperous and better educated Africans had closer contacts with South Africa than with the remoter areas of their own country – the story of the Albasini family, for example, shows how interwoven the lives of the Lourenço Marques creoles were with neighbouring South Africa (Newitt, 1995).

However, there were other nationalist movements that were more rooted in the lives of ordinary people even though the activities of the Portuguese PIDE (political police) meant that they too had to be formed among exile communities (Guimarães, 1998; Marcum,

¹ Amílcar Cabral had a doctorate in agronomy, Agostinho Neto was a doctor and Eduardo Mondlane also had a doctorate and worked for the United Nations.

1969, 1978). For example, “it is estimated that in 1960 there were no fewer than 58 Angolan nationalist organisations active in Leopoldville/Kinshasa.” (Newitt, 2015, 27). In Angola the UPNA – Union of the People of Northern Angola, then UPA – Union of the People of Angola, and later FNLA – Front for the National Liberation of Angola, was essentially a movement among the BaKongo, while in Mozambique there were movements among Mozambican exiles in Rhodesia and Malawi as well as Tanzania. The importance of these alternative political movements is now being actively reassessed for they often presented a vision of the future which was markedly different from that of the parties that came to power in 1975 and were more in tune with the traditional values of the population. They help to explain the opposition to Frelimo and the MPLA that became apparent during the civil wars and which in Mozambique has survived as a strong current affecting the lives of ordinary people (Marcum, 2018; Morier-Genoud, 2012).

The departure of most of the Portuguese population in 1975 deprived Angola and Mozambique of the skills needed to run a modern state and a modern economy. This created a reliance in Angola on MPLA’s Cuban allies and in Mozambique on *co-operantes* from eastern Europe, a reliance which increased the political influence of the eastern bloc countries on the new regimes (Isaacman, 1983; George, 2005).

Role of allies on the left

Both MPLA and Frelimo adopted a left-wing ideology. This was partly to attract international allies in the struggle against Portugal, but it also played to the interests of the urbanised elites who supported the national liberation movements. It was important for them to play down traditional ethnic loyalties and to adopt a non-racial ideology that would endow mestizos, Goans and whites with the same authenticity as native-born Africans, not that the latter were unimportant as the emergence of Agostinho Neto and Eduardo Mondlane as leaders demonstrates (Marcum, 2018; Guimarães, 1998).

Both Frelimo and MPLA asserted that their right to rule was based on their victories in the independence wars. It was a revolutionary not a democratic mandate. There were no elections or referenda to establish the legitimacy of the ruling parties. This may have seemed an irrelevance in 1975 when Angola was faced with a South African invasion and in Mozambique there appeared to be no organised opposition which could have contested power with Frelimo. However, this lack of any popular endorsement would undermine the legitimacy of the ruling parties and would deepen the divisions during the civil wars that followed (Macqueen, 1997; Rosas et al, 2015). Later, both countries held regular elections and, even though these were manipulated to secure the victory of the ruling parties, holding elections was seen as important for the regimes to maintain some degree of legitimacy and international credibility.

At first, both Angola and Mozambique adopted communist-inspired constitutions, Frelimo declaring itself in 1977 to be a vanguard party supported by organisations representing workers, women and youth (Isaacman, 1983). These constitutions rapidly became little more than a way of concentrating power in the hands of a narrow party elite, though Frelimo did embark on an ambitious attempt to introduce a new socialist economic and social order during the first five years after independence (Isaacman, 1983; Munslow, 1985; Newitt, 1995; Cabrita, 2000).

The MPLA successfully claimed power in Angola, initially with the assistance of the departing Portuguese and then with the direct military aid of the Cubans (George, 2005). Little attempt was made to implement any leftist policies and the party became wholly concerned with balancing the pressures of their rival international sponsors, the Soviet Union and the Cubans. This led in 1977 to the so-called Nito Alves conspiracy and the subsequent purges in which tens of thousands of Angolans, many of them originally supporters of MPLA, were massacred and which was to leave an inheritance of fear and factional rivalry within the party (Chabal and Vidal, 2007, 128). Jon Schubert described the aftermath. The massacres,

(...) instilled a climate of arbitrary state violence and deep distrust. Before independence, the PIDE (...) had installed a system of (...) spies that pitted family members against each other; to the shock of many, this system was reproduced in the newly independent country (Schubert, 2018: 37-8).

In Mozambique there was no massacre on this scale but, soon after it took power, Frelimo rounded up large numbers of its opponents and held show trials. A year after independence the leading figures, who had been opposed to Frelimo, were all murdered – according to one account by being burned alive (Cahen, 2010; Marcum, 2018; IJAHS, 2023).

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the ferocious violence of these killings. During the wars of independence the colonial forces had carried out massacres in Angola in order to suppress the 1961 uprisings, while in Mozambique the killing of 350 civilians in Wiriyamu had played a large part in destroying the legitimacy of the colonial regime (Dhada, 2016). MPLA and Frelimo had benefited hugely by publicising these killings. However, the post-independence massacres carried out by independent African governments played differently in a context where widespread African on African violence was becoming a regular feature of African politics (Wilson, 1992), straining the sympathies of many who had supported the independence struggles. The way in which African elites instrumentalised this violence to serve their patrimonial politics was discussed by Chabal and Daloz. They pointed out how in certain circumstances “force becomes the major currency of social and political transactions” because it enables powerful men to feed their client base and becomes the means for achieving objectives rapidly. They pointed out that “armed violence all too easily leads to an instrumentally plausible re-traditionalization of society” (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: ch 6, 82, 87) which explains why the westernised leadership of MPLA resorted to witchcraft beliefs and practices to purge its ranks of dissidents (Chabal and Vidal, 2007: 83, 85).

This may have encouraged the idea that was beginning to emerge that Africans should be left to conduct their politics in their own way and that they should not be expected to conform to values and ideas that were alien to African culture.

Socialism in Mozambique

After 1975, Frelimo, unlike the MPLA, had a brief window of opportunity when it was able to pursue a raft of socialist policies. Among these were the establishment of collective farms and co-operatives in rural areas and the nationalisation of industries and services. These policies were in part lifted from a catalogue of eastern bloc socialist practices,

but they were also inspired by an ideological hostility to traditional authorities and to traditional beliefs and customs as well as by a desire to free the country from its colonial inheritance. As Michel Cahen expressed it, “peasant society must not just be ‘freed’, but ‘modernised’ and ‘organised’” (Cahen, 2010, 207). However, attacks were not only levelled at traditional African culture, but the churches also came under fire with Christian marriage and Christmas celebrations abolished (Newitt, 2002). In many ways, Samora Machel’s advocacy of the ideal of the ‘new man’ – the new scientifically minded, modern Mozambican – was a striking reinvention, in leftist clothing, of the colonial Portuguese idea of assimilation. The ‘new man’ was the close cousin of the old *assimilado*.

A striking example of the colonial inheritance being reworked by a newly independent government determined to do away with the colonial past, was the creation of *aldeias comunais* which concentrated rural populations in large villages where they could be supervised and controlled by the government, and which adopted the methods, and in many cases the actual locations, of the colonial period *aldeamentos* (Coelho, 1998; Wiegink, 2022).

By 1980, however, the socialist experiment in Mozambique was being overtaken by the civil war and in the 1980s civil war also returned to Angola.

Angola and Mozambique caught up in South African destabilisation.

Between 1980 and 1990 both Angola and Mozambique became victims of the destabilisation policies of South Africa which supplied arms to rebel movements and pursued subversion tactics to undermine the regimes in both countries. South Africa’s strategy was not always clear or consistent. While the military commanders supported the armed insurrections of Renamo (Vines, 1991) and UNITA, there were others who advocated the creation of a ‘constellation’ of African states which would be made economically dependant on South Africa.

The state of war enabled Frelimo and MPLA to consolidate their position as one-party states by delegitimising any opposition movement. In the case of Angola this was accompanied by a shameless plundering of the country’s resources and manipulation of its currency by elite party members (Chabal and Vidal, 2007; Oliveira, 2015; Schubert, 2017). Opponents of the regime could now be dismissed as subversives or clandestine allies of South Africa and the South African aggression helped to hide the fact that the civil wars were in large part an expression of the hostility of the populations to the policies of the ruling elites. Both MPLA and Frelimo still cling to the idea that there was never any civil war as such, although this narrative was challenged at the time and has been increasingly challenged since by researchers (Schubert, 2017).

After the Peace Accord in Mozambique was signed, it was agreed that both sides would remain silent about what happened during the war (Igreja, 2008). Although there was nothing like South Africa’s Peace and Reconciliation Commission, neither were there investigations and prosecutions for crimes, particularly crimes against civilians, that had been committed during the years of warfare. The consequence of this was that Frelimo’s narrative of the civil war period was not effectively challenged, except by foreign academics (Cabrita, 2000; Cahen, 2010). More recently, the Frelimo government adopts a similar attitude towards the insurgency in the North which is not considered to have any legitimate internal causes but to be solely the work of foreign religious extremists.

That UNITA was anything more than a front organisation for South African destabilisation, “apartheid stooges, *fantoches* [puppets], and lackeys of Western Imperialism” (Schubert, 2017, 39), is still not recognised in Angola. As Jon Schubert has shown, the official MPLA version of recent history is that real independence did not come with the departure of the Portuguese as the years of civil war were essentially a continuation of the independence struggle.

True independence only came in 2002 which he describes as Angola’s Year Zero. “The post war master narrative thus selectively conceals the conflict’s post-independence period” (Schubert, 2017, 30). This also meant that the victorious MPLA and its president did not have to make any moves towards reconciliation which might have exposed the savage violence which the party had unleashed in 1977 against dissident members of the party and in 1992 in an orgy of ethnic cleansing in the capital. The bulldozing of the old *bairros*, the merging of Luanda’s old municipalities and the renaming of streets is all part of a deliberate policy to erase memories of the past which could come back to haunt Angola’s rulers.

However, this can also be seen as an attempt from Santos and the MPLA not to become prisoners of Angola’s history. The ‘weight of history’ may loom large to academics, as an inheritance that Angolans cannot escape, but for the country’s rulers there may be good psychological and cultural reasons to try to make the past disappear.

Controlling the historical narrative is not, of course, a practice confined to African dictatorships. From one perspective this is another colonial legacy as, through the lens of ‘lusotropicalism’, the ideologues of the Salazar regime had tried to control the narrative of Portugal’s imperial past.

UNITA and Renamo told a rather different story. Both were led by charismatic leaders and Savimbi, in particular, had been able to articulate a strong cultural narrative which cast the MPLA as an urban, mestizo elite, with no roots among the Angolan people (Oliveira, 2015, 13). Dhlakama, like Savimbi, was able to exploit traditional culture, traditional beliefs and rural attachments to the land (Vines, 1991; Cahen, 2002). For example, it was widely believed that Dhlakama had magical powers which would allow him to shrink himself (like Alice in Wonderland) to escape capture by government forces.

Both UNITA and Renamo were adopted by extreme right wing organisations in the West which urged them to adopt an anti-Communist political platform but it is not necessary to look for a coherent ideology or political programme in either movement, as their position was defined simply by their opposition to the ruling parties and, it must be admitted, by a desire to place in power a rival patrimonial leadership. However, this enabled them to sweep up and articulate a whole range of grievances and resentments. UNITA was able to exploit ethnic hostilities and pose as an Ovimbundu party opposed to the Mbundu and creole dominated MPLA, while in Mozambique ethnicity played less of a role than regional issues and the opposition of large parts of the population, particularly in the centre and north, to the modernising agenda of Frelimo.

From its beginnings in 1962, Frelimo had been beset by continual splits and faction rivalries which its president Eduardo Mondlane had not been able to control. When in 1971 the leadership of Frelimo was secured by Machel and his associates, the party appeared

to be controlled by people from the south and the public perception that Frelimo is a ‘southern party’ has continued even when Felipe Nyusi, who came from the north, was elected president in 2016 (Marcum, 2018).

The position of Maputo, the capital, in the extreme south of the country, almost an enclave in South Africa, had isolated it from the rest of the country. As Michel Cahen expressed it, after independence,

the decision to keep Lourenço Marques as the capital of the country was a spectacular illustration of the decision not to change the disequilibria created by colonial capitalism (Cahen, 2016, 198).

Meanwhile, the region north of the Zambezi was almost completely cut off from the south. There were neither roads, railways, nor bridges that effectively linked the two halves of the country. The railway bridge across the Zambezi, which had been constructed in the 1930s, only provided a link to the railway system in Malawi not northern Mozambique, while the first road bridge across the river at Tete, built in the final days of the colonial regime, was also joined to the Malawi road system (Newitt, 2022).

Regional isolation was also a factor in Angola with regions like Lunda, Cuando-Cubango and Moxico, where UNITA was the dominant influence, being remote and almost unknown to the elites of the coastal cities.

1990s and the Washington Consensus.

The end of the Soviet Union and of the apartheid regime in South Africa at the end of the 1980s coincided with major readjustments to the aid policies of the US, the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, and other aid donors. There was a renewed attempt to promote a neo-liberal agenda, both politically with the demand for free elections and multiparty democracy, and economically with the adoption of the ideas of the so-called Washington Consensus. Major changes took place in many African countries which were now encouraged to drop the one-party state model and to reform their state-controlled economies. These changes were the focus of *Africa Works* which pointed out that the new era of democratic elections, even in countries like Zambia where there was a change of regime, did not alter the essentially patrimonial nature of African politics.

Oppositions in Africa seldom have a different political programme but just want their own chance to benefit in a patrimonial way (...) or to challenge their exclusion from the state in the hope that their agitation will earn them co-optation (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 26).

It was in this context that the United Nations became involved in ending the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique.

The UN in Angola and Mozambique.

Internationally sponsored negotiations, beginning in 1988 and culminating in the agreement reached in 1991 at Bicesse in Portugal, were linked with parallel negotiations that brought an end to Cuban intervention in Angola and the withdrawal of South Africans from Namibia (Saney, 2014). In Angola a ceasefire presented an opportunity for elections

to be held in 1992 – the first elections since independence – but these took place in a country where the two rival armies had not been disbanded and where the elections were perceived as being a zero sum game with the winner taking all – a formula ill-suited to ending a civil war. In addition, the UN monitoring operation was under-resourced. The results of the voting were rejected by UNITA and the civil war, kept alive by Angola's diamond and oil wealth, continued until brought to a sudden end by the death of Savimbi in 2002.

Savimbi's death led to an immediate ceasefire and enabled the MPLA to claim a decisive victory, which had not been achieved by foreign arms and was not the result of any internationally negotiated peace agreement. As this coincided with a boom in oil revenues, it gave the MPLA a unique opportunity to embark on post-war reconstruction and a nation-building project without any dependence on foreign aid or any international conditionality (Chabal and Vidal, 2007; Oliveira, 2015; Schubert, 2017).

The UN intervention in Mozambique was better resourced and much more attention was given to demobilisation and resettlement before any elections were held. The civil war had reached a stalemate before the Peace Accord was signed in 1992, and there was effective international mediation by neighbouring African countries, the churches and by the international community, notably by Italy. The role of the Italian St Egidio community in providing a forum in which representatives of the two sides could come together to discuss a range of issues was notable in this respect (Morozzo & Riccardi, 2003). The ceasefire was followed by two years when the UN effectively ruled the country under the energetic supervision of the UN Special Representative, the Italian Aldo Ajello. Arrangements were made for the repatriation of refugees, the demobilisation of armies and a restructuring of the economy. The UN made sure that Renamo had a stake in the peace by giving the party a \$16m fund to help it to convert to a peacetime political movement – in effect allowing Dhlakama to fund his own patrimonial politics (Hall and Young, 1997; Synge, 2005).

Eventually, elections were held in 1994 and Mozambique began a period of uneasy peace under its first democratically elected Frelimo government.

Mozambique after the Civil War.

At the end of the civil war, Mozambique's situation was very different from that of Angola. There had been no decisive military victory, indeed Frelimo's military response during the war had been weak and chaotic. Mozambique had no oil revenues and, at that time, few marketable resources, which made it totally dependent on foreign aid for at least the next two decades. However, although the UN had invested a great deal of resource and effort in trying to create a viable political structure for Mozambique, complete with a liberal constitution and civil society institutions, the Peace Accord turned out to be seriously flawed.

Frelimo had jettisoned its socialist constitution and had adopted a liberal, free market ideology at its party conference in 1988, but it was still dominated by the elite that had taken power after the departure of the Portuguese and its politics followed the logic of African patrimonialism, rewarding the party's clients rather than rebuilding the nation. It adapted to the new international order but with a determination, which had remained

unshaken since 1975, that it and it alone would wield power in the country. Significantly, there was little attempt to co-opt influential Renamo figures or to bring opposition elements into the government – and here it differed from the approach taken by dos Santos in Angola. Moreover, the resettlement of former Renamo fighters and the failure to pay pensions remained an unresolved grievance.

In spite of the influence of outside aid givers, Frelimo determined to act as far as possible like the MPLA, as though it had been victorious in the civil war. The UN brokered constitution had not made any provision for power sharing either at a national or at a local level and, as a result, over a period of thirty years, Frelimo was able to pursue a patrimonial politics which excluded large parts of the population (Manning, 2002).

There were other ways in which Mozambique suffered a democratic deficit. Local government elections took place in the municipalities but, at first, only in 33 out of a planned total of 128 municipalities. The part of the population that lived in rural areas, perhaps 75 per cent of the population, were deemed to live in ‘traditional’ communities under traditional authorities - in many ways a reimagining of the colonial *indigenato* even to the extent of conferring authority on local *régulos* who received government salaries, as had happened in colonial times. The colonial term *regulado* was even employed to describe rural communities (Tornimbeni, 2013). These measures were also aimed at undermining Renamo support in rural areas.

Although local, national, and presidential elections were held at regular intervals under close international supervision, Frelimo had little difficulty in securing electoral victories, partly by transparent fraud in vote counting but also indirectly through controlling every stage of the electoral process. After Frelimo came close to losing control in the 1999 election (when less than 5 per cent of the votes separated Frelimo’s Joaquim Chissano from Afonso Dhlakama), it stepped up its manipulation of the elections, effectively excluding any possibility of future electoral defeats. Even so, opposition parties were able to secure control of some areas of local government, notably Beira and Nampula, the second and third cities in the country, which were controlled for a time by the MDM, a party founded in 2009 as a break away from Renamo. MDM also polled strongly in Maputo in the Frelimo heartland.

After the 1999 elections there was a considerable violent reaction and from that time Renamo increasingly turned to low level political violence in order to achieve some leverage in national politics. Violence recurred after the 2010 and 2014 elections by which time belief in the efficacy of the liberal democratic model had largely disappeared. Renamo was able to do this because, unlike Angola, Mozambique had no effective army or security services.

Statistics from the UNDP Human Development Index (which measures life expectancy, education and per capita income) show that Mozambique remains one of the lowest rated countries in the world – 185 out of 191 in 2021, a decline from 2014 when it ranked 180 (Human Development Index). Although Frelimo had abandoned its socialisation of the countryside, relatively little effort had been devoted to promoting peasant agriculture, although peasant farmers were estimated to constitute 85 per cent of the population. This was the main thrust of a number of publications by Joseph Hanlon and Merle Bowen (Hanlon, 1996; Bowen, 2000; Hanlon and Smart, 2008). The indebtedness of Mozambique

to the IMF and World Bank, which year on year provided 50 per cent or more of support to the national budget, meant that Structural Adjustment policies had to be followed. These were widely held to be responsible for systemic failures to address poverty in the population. However, these policies with their encouragement of privatisation, foreign investment and the removal of subsidies, played well with the patrimonial politics of the Frelimo elite who were able to enrich themselves with directorships of newly privatised companies and spin-offs from the large-scale foreign investments that began to be made (Pitcher, 2002).

The ruling elite of Frelimo also saw China as a partner and collaborator in their rent-seeking politics. China became more and more active in its investments and loans and engaged in extracting resources from Mozambique on a large scale. Deforestation, illegal fishing, and ambitious schemes to grow rice for export were undertaken with the collusion of Frelimo's leading figures and led to growing protests from civil society voices that China was establishing a new colonial relationship with Mozambique (Chichava, 2008).

Frelimo willingly supported the large capital projects which were supposed to achieve modernisation and economic development. As with the restructuring that was taking place in Angola, the government sought international partners for large-scale developments including the extraction of coal and natural gas, mining, transport and infrastructure projects. Brazil and India invested heavily in coal mining in the Tete district and French Total Energies began to exploit natural gas deposits in the north. The mining of rubies by a foreign company also began. These investments were all carried out by a skilled foreign workforce and their contribution to the development of Mozambique's own skills base was minimal (Chichava, 2008; Chatham House, 2015).

Moreover, Frelimo adopted the policies of the former colonial government towards dams on the Zambezi, planning to build a third dam at Mphanda Nkuwa, a giant hydro-electric scheme which would sell electricity to South Africa, ignoring the widespread damage to the environment and the lives of riverain populations (Isaacman, 2013; Newitt, 2022). All these capital projects have resulted in extensive removals and resettlement of the rural population, with forced relocations reminiscent of the later colonial period and the immediate post-independence socialist experiments (Wiegink, 2022). These major capital projects enable Frelimo to represent itself as a modernising party, reflecting very much the modernity of the late colonial period which had also been built on major capital projects and the influx of skilled workers from outside the country to service these developments.

For twenty or so years after the Peace Accord, Mozambique had to respond to the demands of the institutions that kept the country's economy afloat and during this period it was one of the largest recipients of aid in the world.

Chabal and Daloz explain how aid and the involvement of development NGOs benefits the ruling elites.

The use of NGO resources can today serve the strategic interests of the classical entrepreneurial Big Men as well as access to state coffers did in the past (...). There is an international 'aid market' which Africans know how to play with great skill (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 23, 24).

And they go on,

(...) some African politicians cynically exploit the image of Africa as a helpless and miserable continent in order to prompt the involvement of NGOs from which funding and assistance are expected (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 23, 24).

This was cruelly borne out the year after their book was published when southern Mozambique was hit by a devastating flood. Donor aid poured in and a headline in the London *Times* grandly stated 'Mozambique must not be allowed to sink' (Christie and Hanlon, 2001; Newitt, 2002: 234-5).

The changing world order in the 1990s had renewed the objective of aligning Africa with the values and practices of western economics, this time rooted in the ideas and programmes of the Washington Consensus. Mozambique's deep indebtedness required some concessions to transparent governance, and it became necessary for Frelimo to appear to meet the conditions required by the aid givers. Consultations took place with various civil society organisations and poverty reduction programmes were officially adopted but, in practice, Frelimo was able to resist many of these demands, which were rejected out of hand in Angola. After it turned out that Mozambique had major rentable resources in the form of natural gas, Frelimo was able largely to ignore the developmental strategies and the associated compliance which were wished on it by the international community. When it became known in 2016 that members of Mozambique's political elite had secretly negotiated huge loans, bypassing all official parliamentary controls, the extent of Mozambique's alignment with the financial practices of Santos in Angola became fully apparent.

As Frelimo tightened its grip on the country and its resources, a worrying trend became apparent - the high incidence of political assassinations. Some of these were aimed at leading Renamo figures or at overzealous journalists. There was also an increase in kidnappings for ransom with a strong suggestion that the police and leading political figures were benefiting from this form of rent (Chatham House, 2015: 32-33).

Frelimo did not devote much effort to co-opting opposition elements or to reintegrating former Renamo soldiers. Instead, its policy was to exclude Renamo from enjoying any of the dividends of peace. Starved of resources to reward its followers, Renamo could not operate an effective patrimonial politics. As a result, large parts of the population, especially in the centre and the north, were deprived of the benefits of reconstruction. This was only too obvious to anyone comparing the two largest cities. Maputo, which was the centre of the Frelimo government, saw modern buildings and lavish infrastructure expenditure including the refurbishment of old colonial buildings, while Beira, which Frelimo did not control, remained a backwater of decaying public buildings, poverty and vast slums erected in low lying water-logged terrain around the city.

Renamo's response was to stage a return to rural violence, though not on the scale of the 1980s. This eventually had the effect of forcing the government to negotiate a change in the constitution to allow the direct election of provincial governors (Chatham House, 2015). Renamo had assumed that this would allow it to gain influence in the areas of the country where it had always polled strongly. However, again no formal power sharing agreement was negotiated, and Frelimo was able to control an electoral process where

the winner takes all. The failure of this renegotiation and the death of Afonso Dhlakama in 2018 led to the partial disintegration and collapse of Renamo as a political movement.

Northern Insurrection

As Renamo's threat to Felimo's dominance weakened, a more serious challenge appeared with the emergence after 2017 of radical Islamic extremism in the north of the country, with episodes of extreme violence towards civilians reminiscent of Renamo's tactics in the 1980s. The ruling Frelimo elite of Mozambique had sought economic development through collaboration with foreign capital with the result that it had felt able to ignore any pressure for change emanating from civil society. In particular, it had paid little attention to the needs of the remoter regions— the classic *Afrique Inutile*. However, the sectors of the population ignored by the patrimonial elite of Maputo, particularly the rapidly growing younger generation, were not ignored by Islam which was able to exploit the sense of neglect and a wide range of grievances. The insurrection in the north was also fed by internal and transfrontier migrations and by illegal mining operations which highlighted the weakness of the patrimonial state over which Frelimo presided (Forquilha and Pereira, 2022).

The Government's initial response to the growing insurrection in the north was wholly inadequate. Security measures were ineffective and there was no centrally directed response to the challenges posed by the Islamists. Instead, the Frelimo government took refuge in the claim that the northern insurrection was simply a manifestation of global Islamic extremism and had no internal causes. Colina Darch wrote in 2022,

President Nyusi rejected out of hand any idea that local grievances were a causal factor, attributing the conflict instead to 'pure banditry driven by others' greed' (Darch, 2022).

This was a bid for the support of international opinion and echoed the tactics that had been pursued with some success during the civil war period. Meanwhile in 2021 the security situation was off-loaded onto SADCC countries and Rwanda, whose motives for involving itself remained obscure. These could now be conveniently blamed for any future security failures.

Angola

Since the end of the civil war in 2002 Angola was ruled virtually unchallenged by the victorious MPLA, though in practice all the levers of power were held by the president José Eduardo dos Santos. As in Mozambique, there was no formal process of reconciliation but the ruling party took possession of the historical narrative of the independence struggle and the civil wars in such a way that it could smooth over and even deny the issues that had been so controversial during the previous thirty years (Schubert, 2015). During the civil war, the party and the state had effectively become one. However, the situation differed in many important respects from that in Mozambique. In Angola, UNITA had been decisively defeated and for twenty years there was no serious electoral challenge to the MPLA, although elections were still held in order to maintain some internal and international legitimacy. Although the MPLA appeared to be dominant, the party did not

exert any real control over the president who was able to use the oil revenues to create a parallel administration under his own control. While diverting the country’s wealth for his private purposes, Santos nevertheless took the trouble to bring important elements of the party, civil society and even of the opposition onto his patrimonial payroll. This served to dilute somewhat the creole element in the inner elite circle. Santos’s regime was described as one of “shrewd co-optation and modulate authoritarianism.” (Chabal and Vidal, 2007, 5). And among the beneficiaries of the regime can be numbered the generals. “These multimillionaires are thought to have hidden stakes in a huge portfolio of companies in energy, media, construction, transport” (Metcalf, 2013: 110).

The patrimonial networks which bound together the political elites of Angola and their clients in the party and among the middle classes have been described in detail (Chabal and Vidal, 2007; Oliveira, 2015) but clientelism of a different kind exists among the mass of the population and among the immigrants from the DRC and from West Africa, who have been attracted to Luanda by the pickings to be obtained from the economic boom in the city. Here the Angolan police operate a complex protection system. The large numbers of undocumented immigrants survive only by developing close relations with the police, often at the highest level – a system by which the draconian laws against immigrants can be used by the police to earn rich rewards. Here the law exists not to secure an orderly state where citizens can enjoy their rights but to be instrumentalised and turned into an income stream for the security hierarchy. One successful West Africa trader, named Yusuf, explained how the system worked and how it linked up with the patrimonial networks of the elite. He told Paolo Gaibazzi that,

(...) he had to connect with army generals, state officials, and other influential Angolans who controlled the port, customs, licenses, and other strategic assets. A small elite controls virtually every lucrative resource in Angola, including its vast oil wealth. They then redistribute to family members, MPLA party members, and strategic partners, including West African importers and diamond traders, among other foreign investors. Yusuf’s high-profile contacts in the police had been vital in securing his business (Gaibazzi, 2017: 473).

However, it was not just undocumented immigrants who have to try to survive in this way. The vast majority of Angolan nationals have to live by adopting similar strategies. According to Vasco Martins, even documented nationals do not enjoy the full status of citizens and the protection of the law. “Full citizenship is frequently described as a socio-political privilege not a universal right”. The protection of some patron and loyalty to the MPLA is the means to escape marginalisation and enjoy full rights as citizens (Martins, 2016: 11). Citizen rights are as limited in twenty-first century Angola as they were in the colonial period.

Although elements of the UNITA leadership were co-opted to the president’s network, the ordinary rank and file of the UNITA army were, like their counterparts in Renamo, largely ignored. Moreover, there was almost total neglect of public services for the rest of the population. The majority, the *Afrique Inutile*, was excluded from Santos’s modernising project, although the regime remained alert to possible trouble emanating from the vast urban slums of the coastal cities. The oil revenues of Angola, and the fact that a military victory had been won decisively, meant that Santos could proceed to the reconstruction

of the country and the reinvention of Angolan nationality without any significant outside intervention or moderating influence. As in Mozambique, modernisation took the form of contracts with outsiders to carry out large capital projects, some of them like the main road system, of great value to the country, but others becoming useless white elephants with no serious long term developmental value (Oliveira, 2015). According to one commentator, as Angola's post-war economy grew, there have been only "a few thousand direct beneficiaries surrounding an inner circle of only several hundred insiders" which include the "professionals of violence" – the leaders of the army, the police and the intelligence services.

Unlike Mozambique, Angola has not had to respond to conditions set by aid givers. Through its oil wealth it has been able to avoid the conditionality attached to IMF and World Bank loans and instead dealt directly with China and other bilateral partners. However, indebtedness to China and to outside private contractors always threatened to become a problem when oil price fluctuations threatened to limit the wealth Santos was able to deploy.

The extremes of wealth and poverty have become one of the most visible impressions that people have of twenty-first century Angola. Although the wealthy elite cultivated by dos Santos' patrimonialism aspire to all the luxuries of a western lifestyle, this has not led to a well organised and efficiently running state. Here there seems to be a contrast with Mozambique where the capital has become an attractive and functioning city. No such concession to modernity is apparent in Luanda where electricity and water services are patchy, the administration chaotic and traffic jams can lead to a three-hour journey to reach the city centre (Metcalfe, 2013). Why an elite that aspires to be considered progressive and modern should so obviously not care about the efficient functioning of the capital remains a mystery. In some way it must serve the political purposes of the rulers, for an efficient administration and a functioning urban environment would no doubt increase the economic opportunities for all the urban classes and hence lessen their dependence on the clientelism which keeps the president in power.

One of most striking policies of the government has been the systematic destruction of the *musseques*, the shanty towns or *bairros* near the city centre. The poor who lived there and their street trading activities have been moved 30 kilometres or more from the city – where of course the poverty will not be visible to foreign visitors and where any political violence can be easily contained. As Jon Schubert describes it, rebuilding Luanda is "better understood as the practice of 'spacial cleansing'" (Schubert, 2018: 32). The new towns built outside Luanda were "intended to boost the government's legitimacy amongst a core group of loyal supporters", but the failure to provide services like water, electricity and health clinics endangered the whole patrimonial strategy of the housing policy and have even become counterproductive as "dissatisfaction with the shortage or unreliability of services, negative evaluations of government policy performance and a lack of institutional capacity are administrative weaknesses that have further undercut the state's ability to 'order power'" (Croese and Pitcher, 2017: 14-15).

The poverty in which much of the Angolan population live, and the almost total neglect of public services like health and education, contrasts with wealth enjoyed by regime insiders and expatriate technical and professional personnel. However, as in so many

other African countries, including Mozambique, the poverty of the majority of the population is not accidental. "Poverty is a condition that structures the public sphere in Angola". It is a device for making the population dependent – "a way of keeping the masses occupied with daily survival, thus uninformed and unable to make claims on their rights" (Martins, 2016: 8) – a strategy which had undoubtedly underpinned the colonial policy of the Portuguese before 1975 as well.

Chabal, Africa and the international order.

Patrick Chabal always pointed out that Africa is not poor. It is extremely rich in resources and the story of the continent since independence has been largely determined not by its poverty or the legacy of colonial underdevelopment but by what African elites have chosen to do with their resource riches – what their social and political priorities have been. Norway began to exploit its oil reserves at approximately the same time as Angola and since then Norway has always ranked first or second in the world rankings of the Human Development Index. There is no reason, apart from a difference in political culture, why Angola should not also rank among the first nations in the world in terms of human welfare. But in Angola and in Mozambique, policy has been determined by a rent-seeking elite which, since independence, has established political structures based on a scarcely disguised neo-patrimonialism. Although regular elections are held, both Mozambique and Angola have established what is in effect a one party system, but it is one in which the parties exert minimal supervision over the narrow circle of elite families who control the country's resources (including the aid packages negotiated with outsiders and NGOs) and who distribute these resources in order to maintain dominance over all the country's institutions, including the civil society institutions, and hence over the political future of the country.

Major new partners like India and China have largely rejected the idea that outsiders should try to influence the internal politics of Angola or Mozambique, and this is also increasingly called into question by the large capital conglomerates that exploit Africa's resources. That western nations should continue to try to bring Africa into line with the ideas and ideals of western political culture is no longer universally accepted and the reasons for it are no longer clear. After all, as Chabal and Daloz pointed out in their book, the liberal westernising and modernising projects of the last 150 years have so signally failed. Moreover, the shift in western policy from an unquestioned acceptance of the sovereignty of states to a prioritisation of human rights has been criticised as yet another way in which the West can impose conditions on the conduct of politics in the non-western 'third' world (Chabal, 2012: 227-30). Perhaps the ruling elites of Africa should be allowed to run their own affairs according to their own cultural values and objectives.

However, single countries, let alone whole sub-continent cannot be isolated in this way. In the nineteenth century it appeared self-evident that international intervention was needed to put an end to the evils of the slave trade and in the twenty-first century the threats posed by climate change, population growth, money laundering, drug smuggling, pandemics and intercontinental migrations are of global significance and require a global response. Concern over the way that countries like Mozambique and Angola conduct their affairs now seems more urgent than ever.

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AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM UNDER FORMER LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Henning Melber





AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM UNDER FORMER LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA¹

Henning Melber* **Abstract**

Several Southern African states are among the special cases of liberation movements as governments (Bereketeab, 2018). This article takes critical stock of their track record. The decolonization processes in the sub-region, which was largely characterised by settler-colonial minority rule, resulted in the independence of Angola and Mozambique in 1975, Zimbabwe in 1980, Namibia in 1990 and the democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. Since then, the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Frelimo), Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU/ZANU-PF), the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO of Namibia) and the African National Congress (ANC of South Africa) have remained in government, with differing degrees of support in general elections.

While abolishing anachronistic and degrading systems of racist minority rule, new challenges emerged on the difficult path to establishing sound and robust egalitarian structures and institutions, particularly in relation to the promotion of democracy and the strengthening of civil society. What remains is unfinished business. After all, independence without emancipation, through rights, social uplifting, and civil liberties of the *povo* is still far from being liberation.

Liberation movements and political culture

Since seizing power, liberation movements have promoted and cultivated a political culture, which has authoritarianism and populism as substantial ingredients. Surprisingly

¹ This is the considerably revised and expanded version of a keynote presented at the Conference "Pluralism: Democratization and Electoral Integrity in Angola and Mozambique – PDEIAM" (www.pdeiam.com) at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, on 14 December 2022 and partly based on several previous analyses by the author.

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so, their track record has not featured very prominently in international debates. A volume with 14 chapters on Southern cases and perspectives on global authoritarianism (International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies, 2022) has just two African chapters, with a case study on urban authoritarianism in South Africa and one on neoliberalism and authoritarianism in Southern Africa.

Meanwhile, former liberation movements as governments have in Southern Africa shifted their rhetoric from revolutionary anti-colonial sloganeering to populist narratives of authoritarian regimes posing as liberators. Limits in their democratic cultures are covered by claims to militantly defend the achievements of self-determination. Such rhetoric distracts from and covers up the self-enrichment strategies of a new elite, originally moulded within the higher echelons of the anti-colonial movement claiming to bring about a better future for all. At a closer look, such kind of self-determination served as scaffolding and in social political and economic reality translates into a self-determination of the new rulers. Significant participation in shaping the new society under majority rule remains a privilege of those who have replaced those previously in power:

Over time, the perception of legitimacy evolves into a feeling of entitlement. In the minds of its supporters, the liberation movement is a lifelong mission. Power is viewed as a means of fulfilling that mission (Nantulya, 2017).

Since being in power their governance offers sobering results of an appalling track record. While often still blamed on the legacy of white minority rule, after decades of self-determination this sounds like an increasingly hollow excuse seeking to distract from own failures. Despite promises of social transition towards an inclusive society for all, the formal civil rights offered to the majority of people never included a fundamental socio-economic transformation. Under the banner of black economic empowerment and affirmative action a co-optation by a new elite into the existing system of exploitation took place. What happened was a mere modification of a marked we-they divide between “haves” and “haves-not” of a settler-colonial minority rule much determined by a combination of race and class. Social classes – now structured along more ‘colour blind’ lines – remained with minor modifications in place, with a new elite securing material privilege based on political control over the state and its agencies. The relative wealth of natural resources was never used for investments into the well-being and social uplifting of the ordinary people but exploited for the benefit of locally few in a rent-seeking sell-out strategy. As summed up in the editorial of a Namibian daily newspaper:

Even a cursory look at the former liberation movements that eventually ascended to political power in southern Africa reveals their evolution into parties that have vacuumed resources meant for the benefit of the poor and still disadvantaged (Namibian Sun, 2023).

But time is running out: “Long used to unchallenged dominance, liberation movements have significant adjustments to make to rise to the challenge of a new era” (Vandome, 2019). Their dismal track record since in office as governments is a sobering reminder that ‘liberation talk’ is a currency in decline if the words are not followed by evidence of delivery. And the record is at best mixed, with the appeal of liberation dramatically waning – even the so far relatively best performance of SWAPO in Namibia came after 30 years into independence at a crossroad by receiving the first drastic decline in support

by the electorate (Allison, 2019; Melber, 2020, 2021a, 2021b), facing the same erosion of popular support as the other liberation movements in government before. Such warning lights “nurture serious doubts whether the former liberators are the ones to successfully lead the continent in a new ideological struggle to drive sustainable economic development that would benefit all citizens” (Louw-Vaudran, 2017). The views expressed in a Namibian opinion article capture well the current feelings among many of the citizens in the sub-region witnessing the performances of former liberation movements with growing frustration:

During election campaigns, political leaders spend their time pretending – visiting poor people, overnighing in informal settlements, and cooking for vulnerable elders. However, once elected, they park all those concerns until the next campaign (Shikukutu, 2022).

The data in the Human Development Report for 2021/22 speak for themselves: out of 191 countries ranked in the Human Development Index (HDI), South Africa is the only one at the end of the countries listed with a high human development at position 109; Namibia (139), Zimbabwe (146) and Angola (148) rank in the medium human development category, with Mozambique (185) with low human development trailing even further behind (UNDP, 2022: 272-274). The inequality adjusted HDI puts South Africa 22 and Namibia 10 ranks lower (UNDP, 2022: 282f.). Both are competing for the top position among the world’s most unequal societies with the highest GINI coefficients measuring the differences in income among the citizens of a country. Based on World Bank data for 2014 and 2015, South Africa (63.0) and Namibia (59.1) top the ranks, followed on position eight by Mozambique (54.0), with Angola (51.3) and Zimbabwe (50.3) among the higher scores too.²

In terms of political and civil rights, as measured annually by the Freedom House Index³, South Africa and Namibia scored in 2022 with 79 and 77 highest and were classified as free, followed by Mozambique (43) as partly free, and Angola (30) and Zimbabwe (28) as not free. In the 2021 ranking of 180 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index⁴, Namibia (58) and South Africa (70) rank again best, with Angola (136), Mozambique (147) and Zimbabwe (157) trailing behind. The achievements under former liberation movements, both concerning civil liberties and even more so in terms of the lack of material improvements for most people, are in sobering contrast to the promises and expectations what ‘liberation’ from white minority rule would offer.

The social transformation of Southern African societies shaped by a settler colonial brand can therefore, in the light of such track record, at best, be characterised as a transition from controlled change to changed control. The result is a new ruling political elite operating from commanding heights, legitimized as the sole agency of the people by selective narratives and memories related to the war(s) of liberation. These create new (to some extent invented) traditions to establish an exclusive post-colonial entitlement under the sole authority of one exclusive agency of social forces. Politically correct

² <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gini-coefficient-by-country> (accessed 17 December 2022).

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores> (accessed 17 December 2022).

⁴ www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/can (accessed 17 December 2022).

identity is defined by those in power along narrow lines of (self-) definition and (self-) understanding. As observed in the case of Zimbabwe:

whilst power relations had changed, *perceptions* of power had *not* changed. The layers of understanding regarding power relations, framed by socialisation and memory, continue[d] to operate. (...) [Although] actors had changed (...) the way in which the new actors executed power in relation to opposition had not, [because] their mental framework remained in the colonial setting. Patterns from colonial rule of ‘citizens’ ruling the ‘subjects’ [were] repeated and reproduced. (Yap 2001: 312-313; original emphasis)

War shapes its people.

The five former liberation movements as governments had, as anti-colonial movements, seized control of the state machinery and reorganised as political parties. Their legitimacy was rooted in the decolonisation process. The heroic narratives of a patriotic history unfolding tend in all cases to emphasise a liberation through the barrel of the gun. But the turning point for Angola and Mozambique was the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974 in Portugal. This was maybe also to some extent a result of the colonial wars. It triggered not only the end of dictatorship, but also paved the way towards independence of the colonies.

But the ‘new beginning’ was no peaceful transition into a prosperous society. Not only did the retreating Portuguese settlers were leaving behind a path of infrastructural destruction. In Angola, civil war-like battles between the governing MPLA and UNITA paralysed any civil developments. Only the death of Savimbi in 2002 brought some relative peace – in the sense of absence of war at least for most. Similarly, with the creation of Renamo in Mozambique as part of South Africa’s regional destabilisation strategy, Frelimo was for decades embroiled in armed domestic conflict. In both countries there was no fertile ground to foster democracy and good governance. Remarkably so, both UNITA and Renamo since then reinvented themselves as parties, competing for political rule by mainly non-violent means.

In Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa, the legitimacy to govern by the liberation movements ZANU, SWAPO and ANC was secured through general elections as the result of negotiated transfers of political power. However, in Zimbabwe, ZANU soon coerced through genocide-like massacres in Matabeleland the rival ZAPU into a union as ZANU/PE, at the cost of more than 20,000 civilian lives. In South Africa, the end of formal Apartheid minority rule was rocked by civil war like military encounters between followers of the ANC and Inkatha. The violent heritage has left its marks and lives on. This is a sobering reminder that “war shapes its people” – as the German novelist Christa Wolf once put it in her essay “Kassandra”.

The general assumption was to a large extent, at least among those in support of the anti-colonial struggles, that the liberation movements were fighting for self-determination to achieve democracy, human rights, the rule of law and socio-economic transformation for the material benefit of the hitherto marginalised – to serve the masses, so to say. But this was a projection, which was blurred by romanticism of a revolutionary wishful-thinking not aware of realities shaping mindsets for building a new society largely

based on the old one rather than abandoning it. As Soler-Crespo (2019: 29) summarises: “these movements where at its core a group of rebel fighters (...) reinforcing an organizational structure where hierarchy was more important than respect for the opinion of others.” Majority rule under their command and control “was not to establish a liberal multiparty democracy, but to arrive to state institutions”.

Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana had seen this coming. In the early 1970s he participated in the guerrilla war of the MPLA in the rainforest of Cabinda – the *mayombe*. This is the title of his epic novel, published under his nom de guerre Pepetela. In a revealing dialogue, the commander of the guerrilla unit *Sem Medo* (“Fearless”) explains to the political commissar *Mundo Novo* (“New World”):

We don’t share the same ideals. (...) You are the machine type, one of those who are going to set up the unique, all-powerful Party in Angola. I am the type who could never belong to the machine. (...) One day, in Angola, there will no longer be any need for rigid machines, and that is my aim. (...) what I want you to understand, is that the revolution we are making is half the revolution I want. But it is the possible. I know my limits and the country’s limits. My role is to contribute to this half-revolution. (...) I am, in your terminology, adventurer. I should like the discipline of war to be established in terms of man and not the political objective. My guerrillas are not a group of men deployed to destroy the enemy, but a gathering of different, individual beings, each with his subjective reasons to struggle and who, moreover, behave as such. (...) I am happy when I see a young man decide to build himself a personality, even if politically that signifies individualism. (...) I cannot manipulate men, I respect them too much as individuals. For that reason, I cannot belong to a machine (Pepetela, 1996: 197-198).

Therefore, I repeat, the social transformation of Southern African societies shaped by a settler colonial brand can at best be characterised as a transition from controlled change to changed control. The result is a new political elite operating from commanding heights, legitimized as the sole agency of the people by selective narratives and memories related to the war(s) of liberation to establish an exclusive post-colonial entitlement.

Resistance movements normally adopt rough survival strategies and techniques while fighting an oppressive regime. That culture, unfortunately, takes root and is permanently nurtured. All summed up, it becomes questionable whether there is a truly fundamental difference between the political systems they manage to throw out and what they establish in that place. The justification for the legitimacy of the new regime lies primarily not in being democratically elected but in having fought the armed struggle, which liberated the masses. As an analysis of the PLO concluded, the organisation’s legitimacy to represent the Palestine people,

(...) stemmed from the armed struggle the PLO had launched in its early phase. These leaders presented themselves as the fighters for the national struggle, as the custodians of the national rights, and as the healers who can rejuvenate the nation and who know what is good for the people. Thus, the leadership employed its nationalist credentials and the achievements from the revolutionary years as the basis of its political legitimacy. Indeed, they perceived themselves as capable of meeting the national aspirations and of translating them into the tangible reality

of independence and liberty, and the people perceived them as the most trusted agent for the management of their destinies. (Ezbidi, 2006: 63f.)

For South Africa, Suttner (2006, 2008)⁵ thus argues that the liberation movement is a prototype of a state within the state – one that sees itself as the only legitimate source of power, which includes intolerance to any form of political opposition. But he also carefully seeks to explain how the anti-pluralist factor remained largely unnoticed within the underground structures. These cloaked individual, independent minded thinking guided by maybe dissenting moral values, under a collective, which used hardly democratic centralism as a guiding principle to ensure maximum discipline and loyalty as a prerequisite for the survival and ultimate victory. As he suggests, the liberation organisation represented a distinct notion of family. There was a general suppression of ‘the personal’ in favour of ‘the collective’. Individual judgment (and thereby autonomy) was substituted by a collective decision from the leadership. Such “warrior culture, the militarist tradition,” according to Suttner (2008: 119), “entailed not only heroic acts but also many cases of abuse and power”.

Suttner also delivered the prestigious Harold Wolpe Memorial Lecture in early November 2005 at academic centres in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, during which he admitted: “I have said things in this paper I would not have said 20 years ago or, in some cases, until very recently” (Suttner 2006: 26). Among these were his (self-)critical reflections on unity and pluralism within the dominant discourse of the hegemonic rule of the former anti-colonial organisation (the ANC) now controlling and representing the state. As he observes, this form of applied “patriotic history”, which defiantly refuses to acknowledge any meaningful and legitimate opposition, equates the “national liberation movement” with the nation emerging. It is an exclusive, all-embracing concept. Suttner qualified the dominant narrative as,

(...) a language of unity and a language that *tends to represent the unified people as embodied in the liberation movement organisation and then equates them with the people as a whole*. (...). In a sense the liberation movement depicts itself as a proto-state. This notion derives from a framework of ideas in which the seizure of the state was represented as the central issue of the day. (original emphasis) (Suttner, 2006: 24).

He maintained, that,

(...) it is important, as part of the nation we are building, to acknowledge without qualification that people have the right to organise in a variety of sectors, linked to or in opposition to the government of the day. No political organisation can represent every sectoral interest and it is important that such sectoral organisations exist. No one should be discouraged from becoming involved in such activity or depicted as disloyal for doing so (Suttner, 2006: 25).

While the challenge today is not to overthrow legitimate political systems and structures by illegitimate means, the task at hand is to improve society in favour of more justice, equality and humanity. There is wide scope in any given society of this world for such efforts – not least among those in Southern Africa.

⁵ Suttner was an underground ANC operative in South Africa and spent years in solitary confinement as a political prisoner. As a member of parliament and later as ambassador, he represented the ANC and South Africa’s democratic state before returning to the academic world and turning a back on the ANC.

The anti-democratic legacy of violence

Post-colonial politics often show a blatant lack of democratic awareness and take forms of neo-patrimonial systems. A case study of Mozambique suggested that regular elections, “have not been accompanied by a steady institutionalisation and ‘Mozambicanisation’ of democratic values, norms, and rules” (Braathen & Orre, 2001: 200). Since then, Mozambique continued its march to authoritarianism with new forms of entrenched undemocratic rule under the current President Nyusi (Nhamirre, 2022).

The unabated exploitation of Angola’s oil wealth by a powerful oligarchy within the MPLA, when the country’s population remains among the most destitute in the world, is one of the biggest scandals on the continent. Elections in Angola were postponed time and again, using the delays to manufacture control over the electoral process to guarantee victory. In such circumstances, constitutionalism and the rule of law are absent from the political system (Vidal with Chabal, 2009; Southall, 2014). Instead, those in government and state take over civil society (Messiant, 2001) and turn the country into a corporate business (Marques de Morais, 2010). The continued decline has since then opened windows of opportunity for a stronger opposition (Pearce, 2023), with the MPLA,

(...) unable to reconfigure state-society relations in ways that reconciled greater political freedoms with its continued hegemony, attesting to the growing disconnect between its governance methods and the country’s changing sociopolitical composition and economic needs. Unlike in the past, war is now unavailable as an alibi for poor governance, while declining oil wealth cannot provide a backstop for the distributive pressures to which the government is subjected (Lippolis, 2022).

Tendencies to autocratic rule and towards the subordination of the state under the party, as well as politically motivated social and material favours as a reward system for loyalty or disadvantages as a form of coercion in cases of dissent, are common techniques also in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. The political rulers’ penchant for self-enrichment with the help of a rent – or sinecure – capitalism goes hand in hand with the exercise of comprehensive controls to secure the continuance of their rule. Accordingly, the term ‘national interest’ means solely what *they* say it means,

Liberation movements came to represent so much the people’s will that they ended believing they actually were the people, excluding anyone who didn’t support their rule as traitors to the nation (Soler-Crespo 2019: 29).

Based on the rulers’ (self-)perception, individuals and groups are allowed to participate in, or are excluded from, nation-building. The ‘national interest’ justifies authoritarian practice. Any group that resists the power of the ruling elite is either ‘anti-national’ or ‘unpatriotic’, if not accused of acting as a fifth column for ‘regime change’ deployed by foreign Western imperialist interests. In response to growing pressure for policy changes, both domestically and internationally, the former liberation movements closed ranks and “ignored governance issues by focusing more on regime survival” (Panganayi & Marovah, 2020: 165). Such retention of power had little to do with democratic principles, but much with the commando structures that emerged during the liberation struggle. As the late South African political activist Rhoda Kadalie observed in an interview:

Many of my former comrades have become loyal to a party rather than to principles

of justice. (...) Unfortunately, it is true that those who have been oppressed make the worst democrats. There are recurring patterns in the behaviour of liberation parties – when they come to power they uphold the most undemocratic practices (Kadalie, 2001).

De Jager and Steenekamp (2016: 928, 930) diagnosed a “liberation movement syndrome” for the ANC. They identified a self-conception of the party “as the leader, voice and embodiment of the people”. It governs with a “pre-eminence of a liberationist culture, where group rather than individual responsibility is important”. Those in power are at best prepared to be accountable only to themselves (Good, 2002). There is a lack of (self-) critical awareness and extremely limited willingness to accept divergent opinions, particularly if they are expressed in public. This drastically limited the capacity for reform in the interest of good governance. A culture of fear, intimidation and silence inhibits the possibilities of durable renewal at the cost of the public good.

Such tendencies are not new. Witnessing the emergence of sovereign governments and their policies in West African states during the late 1950s, Frantz Fanon presented in 1961 a scathing criticism of the rule of ‘liberators’. In chapter three of his manifesto “The Wretched of the Earth”, he characterized the performances as “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”. For Fanon, the new state instead of conveying a sense of security, trust and stability foists itself on the people, using mistreatment, intimidation, and harassment as domesticating tools. The party in power “controls the masses (...) to remind them constantly that the government expects from them obedience and discipline” (Fanon, 2001: 146f.).

In Southern Africa, the end of white minority rule was accompanied by the belief that the seizure of political power translates into “the end of history” in the sense that governance under former liberation movements is pre-determined once and for all: as from now on, there cannot exist any legitimate alternative, and changes in political control over the respective countries can only happen within those movements turned parties. As Clapham warned, they,

(...) regard themselves as the embodiment of the very state they sought to establish through struggle. In their own minds, they are permanently entitled to govern, and – far from recognising internal splits and domestic opposition as signals that they have outlived their welcome – treat them instead as challenges to the rightful order they themselves represent, and consequently as pretexts for remaining in power. Yet the liberation credit is a finite one, and is characteristically exhausted in the minds of much of the population much sooner than leaders recognise. The moment soon arrives when the regime is judged not by its promises but by its performance, and if it has merely entrenched itself in positions of privilege reminiscent of its ousted predecessor, that judgement is likely to be a harsh one (Clapham, 2013: 56).

The militant resistance to overthrow white minority rule was combined with a promise for a better future. But the transfer of power and subsequent transformation was limited to handing over administration and governance to the erstwhile liberation movement. A new elite occupied the commanding heights of the state. It secured a similar status to those who under the old system were the privileged few. As succinctly put by Malyn Newitt in his keynote to the Conference on “Pluralism: Democratization and Electoral

Integrity in Angola and Mozambique – P-DEIAM (www.pdeiam.com) at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, on 14 December 2022: “the new man was a close cousin of the old *assimilado*”. This showed the narrow “limits to liberation” (Melber, 2003). It is not by coincidence that this has contributed to a renaissance in engaging with the writings of Fanon, with frequent references to the said chapter on “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness”.

Forms of democracy resembling features of a one-party dominance, were classified by Levitsky and Way (2002, 2010) as “competitive authoritarianism”. As they argue, parties whose origins lie in war, violent anti-colonial struggle, revolution, or counterinsurgency, appear to be more durable. Their concept of democracy is also based on the misunderstanding that a majority rule equates democracy. As pointed out by Southall,

The struggle for liberation was one far more for majority rule and national self-determination than for liberal democracy. Whereas liberal democracy envisages the principle of majority decision-making as being constrained by respect for the rights of individuals and minorities, there was (and is) a tendency embedded in national liberation thought which equates majoritarianism with democracy (Southall, 2014: 85).

In Southern Africa, current populist discourses rely on heroic narratives to create continued identification with a past to legitimize the present. While governments need more than only an electoral majority based on (increasingly dubious) numbers combined with a populist rhetoric, such appeals have been an integral part of post-settler-colonial narratives in the region.

Populism as a dominant feature

This draws attention to a specific form of populism (Melber, 2018, 2022a). Engagement with this phenomenon had in the past mainly focused on the context of established democracies in which populists mobilize against an establishment and appeal to sentiments suspicious of those democrats in government, rallying “against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society” (Canovan, 1999: 3). Populism, as a “universal mode of expression for unique national, cultural, class, ethnic, or racial identities of ‘the people’” (Halisi, 1998: 424) came as a handy tool. But the times when leaders of the dominant parties could claim to be the alternative to the establishment are over. After all, they are the establishment. Their appeals to populist reminiscences of a bygone era of the ‘struggle days’ have become increasingly less convincing. While populism continues to appeal to identification with the continued struggle against foreign domination, marketing oneself as the only true alternative and promise of a better future becomes increasingly hollow. It is a kind of retrospectively applied populism vis-à-vis a colonial dominance that has been replaced by a governing party perpetuating colonial features. The claim of an ongoing struggle led by the former liberation movement as the sole legitimate authority to represent the people freed from the colonial oppression is an effort of fending off any domestic political opposition.

Under such governments, there is no level playing field. The equation that the party is the government, and the government is the state has been firmly anchored in practices and mindsets. This does not mean that the voters have no choices. They officially have.

But making use of these is not necessarily reflected in the official election results. Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe are the obvious cases. In blatant dismissal of voters’ choices, Zimbabwe’s ZANU/PF as well as President Mugabe remained in power twenty years based on sheer violence and fabricated results. Their closest allies in SADC – the four other liberation movements as governments – willingly and consciously accepted the fraud and closed eyes and ears concerning the systematic oppression and violence since the mid-1980s. As Soler-Crespo points out, former liberation movements,

(...) still believe legitimacy is bestowed upon them by their struggle and not by the ballot, in such manner that if they lose elections they are ready to turn to repression, coercion and violence to stay in power, (...) By turning a blind eye on ZANU-PF’s flagrant violations on human rights, liberation movements in Southern Africa show that brotherhood and collaboration between former struggle fighters is ahead of their respect for democracy (Soler-Crespo, 2019: 29).

But cohesion through coercion based on state terror is not sustainable nation-building. One should consider the warning expressed by Stanley:

Authoritarian societies (...) mimic many of the characteristics of socially cohesive societies. They coordinate action of members in a way which looks like willing cooperation (but which always has a coercive component). (...) they succeed in achieving these characteristics at the price of coercion and exclusion (Stanley, 2003: 9).

Most of the political parties claiming to be an alternative are at a closer look not. Most of these have no fundamentally different agenda from seeking access to power and privileges. Their internal factionalism in many cases replicates what is happening in the power struggles within the former liberation movement. The sobering conclusion by Gasnolar for South Africa applies to all the cases in different nuances and degrees:

South Africans battle against machinery and systems that are currently wielded without their participation. Power that has been eroded from the people. Power that has been wrapped up in process, and reshaped towards politics of ego and the stomach.

In this vicious cycle and cesspool presenting itself as democracy, South Africans are both the victims and losers of a system that has been designed to prop-up party political structures.

In the vacuum of civic participation programmes, efforts to deepen/strengthen democracy and real commitment to supporting citizen-led processes and engagement, we will continue to be poorly served by our political system. After all, those systems are not about service to people, those systems are not about commitment to the Constitution but rather they are about power (and its absolute pursuit) and securing the futures of those in its structures. The role of party political structures will continue to dominate our economic, social and political realities as long as we tolerate this broken system (Gasnolar, 2022).

As once summed up in the popular song ‘The system is a joke’ by the Namibian artist Elemotho G. R. Mosimane on his first CD released in 2000:

Don’t you see, the system is a joke, all they feed us is Coke. Please don’t bother your soul, we’re moving in circles, such, such a circus.

Liberation struggles as struggles of appropriation.

As observed by Roger Southall (2013: 247, 330f.), while “liberation movements espoused ideologies prioritizing ‘the capture of state power’ as the means to transform societies structurally skewed”, they created inevitable tensions between the values of liberal democracy and transformation. The result was – in line with the specific trajectory of each of the societies – a party state, which “was simultaneously a ‘party machine’, a vehicle for the upward mobility of party elites and for material accumulation justified ideologically by reference to the historical rightness of transformation”. Put more bluntly: struggle veterans were convinced that their sacrifices justify that now the time has come for them to eat.

Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of democratic South Africa’s second President, ended his critical deliberations on the post-Apartheid ‘architects of poverty’ with the conclusion, that the emerging African elites are with few exceptions a parasitic class. They,

(...) have no sense of ownership of their country and are not interested in its development. They view the country primarily as a cash cow that enables them to live extravagantly (...) as they attempt to mimic the lifestyles of the colonialists. (...) With the lack of ownership goes the pillaging of resources, neglect of the welfare of the people, corruption, capital flight and, ultimately, brutality against dissenting voices (Mbeki 2009: 174).

A speech by the former leader of the ANC Youth League Julius Malema, now heading the Economic Freedom Fighters, of 3 April 2010 in Harare, confirms the point:

We want the mines. They have been exploiting our minerals for a long time. Now it’s our turn to also enjoy from these minerals. They are so bright, they are colourful, we refer to them as white people, maybe their colour came as a result of exploiting our minerals and perhaps if some of us can get opportunities in these minerals we can develop some nice colour like them (Sunday Times, 2010).

Such pseudo-radical populist rhetoric seeks to detract from the fact that nationalisation of this kind is merely a disguise for the class interest by those in control over the state with the intention to privatise the assets. As the South African Communist Party cadre Dominic Tweedie comments:

Malema is a true demagogue. He claimed to be more communist than the communists, while wearing a R250,000 Breitling watch. (...) He is talking of nationalising the mines, but admits that what he really means is a “public-private” partnership – a socialism for the capitalists. (...) We have a struggle against fascism in this country, (...) The fascists we have to fear are young, and black, very arrogant and very foolish (Tweedie, 2010).

The social movement activist Mphutlane wa Bofelo pointed out that when a new elite, claiming to be in direct descent of the struggle aristocracy, sings the songs of the past, this,

(...) is not a reflection of how attached they are to the struggle, but an attempt to locate the struggle literally in the past. They want us to believe that the struggle is over, that all we have is remnants of the old order against whom our anger should be vented. In this way, the political elite sidetracks us from singing about the cur-

rent dislocation of water and electricity, the ruthless and violent eviction of shack dwellers (...), the vicious police attack on service delivery protesters, the financial exclusion of students, the kleptomaniac proclivities of the new political and economic elite, the advent of black colonialists, attacks on the freedom of media, the massive acts of de-politicisation, de-historicisation of our struggle and concerted efforts towards de-memorialisation (Wa Bofelo, 2010).

Engaging with the democracy deficit of liberation movements as governments in the region, Gumede (2017) lists the following elements as limiting factors: One-partyism; centralisation of decision – and policy – making; discouraging competitive leadership elections; cult of the leader; domination of a small clique; playing ethnic politics; fusion of party and state; dismissal of opposition; fractured and irrelevant opposition parties; frilling of civil society; abuses of liberation and independence rhetoric; ambivalence to democracy; intolerance to dissent; culture of secrecy; cult of violence; internalization of the culture of undemocratic colonial governments; unchallenged acting as vanguard; entitlement to permanent rule; and moral bankruptcy of movements and leaders. As he concludes:

African independence and liberation movements turned governments have often become obstacles to building lasting democracies. Their internal organisational cultures, leaders and the way they exercise power have more often (...) undermined democracy (Gumede 2017: 44).

As the cases under scrutiny suggest, the blending of party, government and state under former liberation movements testifies to a constellation based on the use of force to gain liberation from the undemocratic, repressive conditions that prevailed in the colonial societies of Southern Africa. These were hardly favourable for the creation and durable strengthening of human rights, civil liberties and democratic norms based on transparency and accountability of governance. While abolishing anachronistic and degrading systems of racist minority rule, new challenges emerged on the difficult path to establishing sound and robust egalitarian structures and institutions, particularly in relation to the promotion of democratic societies and the strengthening of civil society (Vidal with Chabal, 2009).

It is of little comfort, that much of what can be critically observed concerning former liberation movements now as parties in government, applies as characteristics to many political opposition parties too (Teshome, 2009), who often reproduce very similar limitations in terms of internalized values. Their notion of democracy tends to be related to the mere desire for holding power, instead of being a true alternative in terms of power sharing. This reduces political competition to a mere struggle for access to government and privileges, with the lack of true democracy as the collateral damage.

The limits to liberation.

While abolishing anachronistic and degrading systems of racist minority rule, new challenges emerged on the difficult path to establishing sound and robust egalitarian structures and institutions, particularly in relation to the promotion of democracy and the strengthening of civil society. The inherent contradictions were aptly summarised by Southall:

Liberation movements represent a heritage of struggle which is simultaneously emancipatory (seeking to free oppressed peoples from the chains of the past and from the social and economic deprivations of the present) and repressive (in that liberation elites claim for themselves the right to interpret the will of the people). If constitutional rule is to survive and advance in Southern Africa, it will need the support of counter-elites and wider society to contest the repressive components of liberation movement culture in order to secure the freedoms for which the liberation movements themselves claim to have fought (Southall, 2014: 97).

What remains is unfinished business. After all, independence without emancipation, through rights, social uplifting, and civil liberties of the *povo* is still far from being liberation. The times when leaders of the dominant parties could claim to be the alternative to the establishment are over. They are the established system. Their appeals to populist reminiscences of a bygone era of the ‘struggle days’ sound increasingly hollow. Being escorted in the latest models of European limousines by motor cavalcades and flying in presidential jets to wine and dine with other leaders in the world are a mismatch with the liberation gospel.

Former liberators are increasingly measured against the lack of delivery in governance, while the mystification of the struggle is fading away with the veterans. Demographically, the born frees by now – even in the next elections in Namibia and South Africa – are a decisive number of voters. The younger generation’s middle classes, initially beneficiaries in their social ascendancy due to their affinity to the new political and administrative structures, realise that their upward mobility has stagnated. With other political formations making inroads, the liberation gospel is not any longer good enough to remain in power. Observations presented about Windhoek (Melber, 2022b), resonate to some extent also with assessments for younger generations’ middle class (re-) positioning in Luanda (Schubert, 2016) and even more so Maputo (Sumich, 2018; Nielsen/Jenkins, 2021). Political trends among segments in the younger urban black middle class in South Africa as the “born free” generation seem – as suggested by Oyedemi (2021) – to replicate similar shifts.

Soler-Crespo diagnoses some “grave errors” contributing to the “slow death of liberation movements”, as follows,

From abandoning their socialist agenda to focusing on state capture through political deployment of party members and engaging in dubious nepotist activities with white-owned large-capital, liberation movements have abandoned the ones who they fought for, sidelining its youth and the majority black population who suffer similar income inequalities and unemployment rates as they did in apartheid times. Inter-party fights between members craving for power indicates that liberation movements have forgotten why and who they fought for and now instead fight between them for the same privileges they once fought against (Soler-Crespo, 2019: 16).

In the light of the limited socio-economic and – political emancipation for and empowerment of the majority of the people, it seems a sad irony that the Museum of African Liberation is, of all places, under construction in Zimbabwe’s capital Harare – since late 2022 (!), with the support of the Russian Federation (Staff Reporter, 2022). As a re-

minder: under Robert Mugabe the country was turned into a kleptocratic meritocracy ruthlessly ruled by an autocrat, whose securocrats in military and police were eliminating any meaningful opposition by brutal force. The deterioration into a police state had devastating consequences for the ordinary people. Despite Mugabe’s forced retirement in a hardly concealed military coup, “Mugabeism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015) lived on under his successor and erstwhile closest confidante Emmerson Mnangagwa. He is nicknamed “the crocodile”. It reminds of him being in charge when the government of the predominantly Shona-based ZANU coerced the competing Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) with its home base among the Ndebele in Matabeleland and Midlands into a ZANU-led coalition as ZANU-PF. It is estimated that between 1983 and 1987 more than 20,000 civilians in what was dubbed the *Gukurahundi* were murdered with utmost brutality in genocidal massacres, mutilating many more (Phimister, 2008). Mnangagwa’s governing track record has been appalling (Mhaka, 2021). Zimbabwe is among the saddest examples how former liberators turned into perpetrators, betraying the declared noble goals.

One should however also not lose sight of what the alternative to the liberation movements seizing power and capturing the independent state might have been. Fighting settler-colonial regimes came with a high price, not only in terms of human sacrifices but also of sacrificing human rights and humanity. But continued settler-colonial rule – from Algeria to Zimbabwe – would most likely not been a better alternative. After all, the right to self-determination and – if only formal – civil rights for the ordinary people remain achievements, even if they are in reality a far cry from human dignity for all. They are a point of departure for the continued relevance of the slogan created in the anti-colonial movements, that the struggle continues (*a luta continua*), which since then unfortunately translated too often into ‘the looting continues’.

The late South African poet and activist Dennis Brutus articulated his frustration over this betrayal in 2000 through the following lines:

Forgive me, comrades,
 if I say something apolitical
 and shamefully emotional
 but in the dark of night
 it is as if my heart is clutched
 by a giant iron hand:
 ‘Treachery, treachery’ I cry out
 thinking of you, comrades
 and how you have betrayed
 the things we suffered for.
 (Brutus, 2005: 87)

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MOZAMBIQUE'S 2023 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: A SYSTEM IN FREEFALL

Luca Bussotti





MOZAMBIQUE'S 2023 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: A SYSTEM IN FREEFALL

Luca Bussotti * **Abstract**

Municipal elections in Mozambique have historically been a time when the party in power since 1975 (Frelimo) has allowed some political room for opposition parties. This has led to both Renamo and the Mozambique Democratic Movement (MDM) governing major cities, such as Nampula, Quelimane and Beira. This precarious equilibrium – Frelimo dominating at the national level, but some cities managed by opposition parties – was ruptured during two successive events: Guebuza's presidency and the municipal elections of 2023. In the latter case, the 'Power to the People' youth movement, an informal organization formed in March 2023 after the death of rapper Azagaia, introduced a new variable within the Mozambican political context. The implicit pact between Frelimo and Renamo ended, and a new landscape developed. This article suggests that the 2023 Mozambican municipal elections, albeit local in nature, represented a point of no return in the crisis of the system of power centred on Frelimo as well as on its connivance – sometimes visible even in the 2023 electoral process – with the two main opposition parties, and especially Renamo.

Introduction

Mozambican democracy has been described as one of the few cases of success in Africa (Manning, 2002; Reibel, 2008; Repell, Rozen and Carvalho, 2016), including by IMF observers (Peiris and Clément, 2008). Nevertheless, many doubts have arisen since the 1990s and the 2000s (Cabrita, 2000; Weinstein, 2002; Hanlon, 2004; Darch, 2018; Vines, 2020); yet critical interpretations have not been given much consideration by the international community, due to a desire to show that the vast sums spent on stabilizing the country after 16 years of civil war had not been wasted (Hanlon, 2010).

Avenues for democracy in Africa have been tortuous. Almost

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all sub-Saharan African countries, starting from the 1990s, experienced a transition to democracy (Kpundeh, 1992; Mozaffar, 1997; Bratton, 2004), yet only a few were able to implement sustainable democracies. International indexes have tracked this situation since the 1990s (Freedom House, 2022; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022), with Mozambican democracy classified by such indexes as an ‘hybrid regime’ or, in the last few years, as an authoritarian regime. Among the most sceptical observers, various definitions have been attributed to Mozambican democracy: as that of a ‘competitive authoritarianism’ regime (Levitsky and Way, 2004); a ‘blocked democracy’ (Bussotti, 2014); or as a ‘dollarocratic’ state, immersed in extensive corrupt practices and showing an evident lack of efficiency (Ngoenha and Castiano, 2019).

Mozambican democracy is founded on the governance system that emerged from the General Peace Agreement (GPA) signed in Rome in 1992 between Joaquim Chissano (President of Mozambique) and Afonso Dhlakama (President of Renamo). That model – consistent with the new Constitution approved in 1990 – established a multi-party regime and free elections, but at the same time maintained a high concentration of power in the hands of the President (which was never contested by Renamo) and, in political terms, an implicit pact between Frelimo and Renamo, or between Chissano and Dhlakama.

After the signing of the GPA, Renamo had no credibility in the eyes of the international community. Thus, the chances of electoral victory for Dhlakama’s party were significantly reduced. Nevertheless, the international community aimed to implement a paradigmatic model of peace which served as good practice for other African countries not yet in conflict (Morozzo Della Rocca, 2002). Dhlakama had little choice but to be part of this game. Chissano’s diplomatic approach towards Renamo helped build a model of possible coexistence between the two old enemies. For instance, Dhlakama obtained the concessions of important mines in central Mozambique, such as in Manica, Sofala and Zambezia provinces (Folha de Maputo, 2015). This made him a wealthy man, able to distribute part of this wealth to his most loyal followers. In addition, Renamo did not hand in all the weapons it possessed, and not all its military forces were demobilized. These circumstances gave Dhlakama a sense of security and protection that Chissano never questioned. Nevertheless, Chissano’s tolerant approach in relation to an important clause of the GPA constituted an Achilles’ heel in the new Mozambican democracy. As Chissano himself stated when the second war between Mozambican government and Renamo resumed, his worst mistake as President was to tolerate the presence of Renamo’s parallel army. This allowed Renamo to maintain its dual nature – as a political party, but also an alternative army to the national one (LUSA, 2014).

Chissano aimed to coexist peacefully with Renamo and Dhlakama, holding them in check from afar. A first moment of high tension was the second general elections, held in 1999. Extensive electoral fraud was necessary to ensure Frelimo and its candidate, Chissano, achieved a painful victory. Chissano officially won with 52% of the votes, but this election result still casts gigantic shadows today (Van Dokkum, 2021). Despite a very serious accident, which led to the death of about 100 Renamo activists detained in Montepuez (Cabo Delgado province) after they had been arrested due to demonstrating against the electoral results, Dhlakama decided not to resume the war (AIM, 2000). The atmosphere of a ‘blocked democracy’, where human rights and free of expression were growing slowly but surely, and where peace seemed to be stable, continued until the

second mandate of Guebuza as Chief of State (2009–2014). Nevertheless, the 1999 elections prompted Dhlakama to start thinking that undermining Frelimo using the avenues of general elections and the central government was very complicated. Participating in municipal elections could be an initial way to penetrate the elected institutions of the country, which until then had been inaccessible to Renamo. The municipal elections of 2003 were the first time that Renamo was able to take control of some municipalities, including the important city of Beira.

The transition from President Chissano to President Guebuza complicated relations with Renamo. Guebuza did not share Chissano's view that Renamo had to continue to coexist with Frelimo: his goal was to annihilate Renamo. Thus, the implicit pact between Chissano and Dhlakama was broken, and war returned in 2012–2013. Many important organizations (the Catholic Church, the Fórum Mulher, the Mozambican League for Human Rights) appealed for Guebuza to negotiate with Dhlakama, but such calls were not heeded (Bicho, 2013). With the war, the question of the country's institutional arrangements became the central issue on the Mozambican political agenda. Dhlakama and his loyal guerrillas were forced to shelter in the Serra of Gorongosa, after numerous assassination attempts by the Mozambican police (LUSA, 2015). The centralist culture of Renamo gave way to calculations that saw decentralization, federalism, or even the division of the country as a huge opportunity to undermine the Frelimo from below, gradually reducing its almost absolute power. After a quiet period, Renamo re-invented itself, achieving important concessions from Frelimo in terms of institutional arrangements, particularly at the local level, helped by good results at the 2014 general elections. As explained below, the path of decentralization became a vital objective for a regenerated Renamo.

Weak local culture, weak decentralization, weak democracy

The shift from a central to a local political culture was difficult and time-consuming. Indeed, local issues had never been a priority in Mozambique, either in the socialist period or in the period that is of most interest here, the 'Second Republic'.

In the socialist period, Samora Machel coined an expression with deep symbolic meaning, which speaks volumes about how important the construction of a unified and centralized state was, in parallel with limiting local issue, both culturally and politically. This expression was, 'killing the tribe to make the nation' (Paredes, 2014). Its repercussions were considerable: the room for traditional cultures, including religion, for socio-anthropological forms of organization at the local level, and for the use of mother tongues in public as well as private spaces was cut to the bone, provoking opposition (Bussotti e Nhaueleque, 2022). This process culminated not only with the formation of Renamo, but with the wide sympathy this movement gained, mainly in the central and northern countryside (Cahen, 2019; Fernando, 2021).

The literature failed to grasp the importance of local and cultural issues, as it was steeped in Mozambique's internal Marxism (Bragança, 1980; Cabaço, 2001), which included highly regarded foreign scholars (Isaacman e Isaacman, 1983; Hall, 1990). They too sympathized with the revolutionary project pursued by Samora Machel. Surrounding the Centre for African Studies at the University of Eduardo Mondlane was a group of historians and

economists who devoted themselves primarily to the analysis of class relations in the countryside, especially during the colonial period (First, 1983; O’Laughlin, 1996), while the contributions of experts such as John Saul and others aimed to support Samora Machel’s socialist policies. Any criticism from these two groups came ‘from the left’, appealing to the adoption of a more orthodox socialism with full awareness of class relations within the new Mozambique (Bragança, 1980a). Cultural, local and social aspects were little studied at the time, so that ethnic-linguistic affiliations became a problem to be solved (or to be negated) rather than a resource to be used for the balanced and inclusive development of the country. Any kind of cultural manifestation had to gain the central government’s approval; everything had to be subordinated to the socialist ideals of the time.

With much delay, the specialized researchers understood the importance of local (and rural and cultural) issues in explaining the support that Renamo had in some parts of the country, despite its brutality during the 16-year war (Geffray, 1991; Florêncio, 2002). This delay, however, did not put a dent in the strategic choices of Renamo and its leader, Afonso Dhlakama. Since the peace agreement discussions, Dhlakama was clear, on the one hand, about the consensus his politico-military formation had in a large part of the country; on the other hand, however, he tried to use this consensus to undermine Frelimo and its president. The Renamo leader was preoccupied with assuming the presidency of the republic, neglecting alternative ways such as control of local institutions. Only after the general elections of 1999, and especially since 2011–2012, has Renamo’s political strategy changed in favour of a radical project of decentralization.

The history of the decentralization process is well documented (Weimer, 2012; Weimer and Carrilho, 2017). The first attempt to introduce decentralization, with local elections, failed in the first half of the 1990s. After the government had elaborated the PROL (Program of Reform of Local State Organs) in 1991, the following step had to be a law to identify the local administrations where Mozambicans had to elect their leaders. Law 3/94, proposed by the then-Minister of Public Administration, Aguiar Mazula, identified 23 urban municipal districts and 128 rural municipal districts (Rosário, 2015). It meant that the process of decentralization covered all of Mozambique. The conservative approach of the two main Mozambican parties prevailed over the reformist vision of Mazula and his minority political group within Frelimo, whose main representative was Óscar Monteiro. Law 3/94 was not passed by the Mozambican Parliament. A more ‘moderate’ law came into effect in 1997 (Law 2/97), identifying only 33 cities which in 1998 had to choose their mayor (Baloi, 2023). In the rest of the country, districts and provinces continued to be managed by political figures appointed by the central government, loyal to Frelimo. In 2009, for the first time, provincial assemblies were elected, but their presidents continued to be appointed by the Chief of State, regardless of which political party had a majority in the provincial assembly.

For similar reasons, Renamo and Frelimo both supported the idea of a moderate and gradual process of decentralization, at least initially. Frelimo saw the new institutional arrangement as a potential risk to its political power. The likelihood of Renamo winning in various municipalities in central and northern Mozambique was high, thus it was preferable to limit this risk. Yet, municipalities could also guarantee Frelimo new forms to extend its influence and its political patronage, since many charges had to be distributed. Meanwhile, Dhlakama had bet on his own victory in the general elections,

had a centralized political culture and feared the emergence of local leaders who might threaten his leadership. As a result, in 2004, Renamo's political programme for the general elections did not say anything about decentralization (RENAMO, 2004). The 'local question' was limited to a brief mention of local authorities, while there was little investment in human capital to compete against Frelimo in the main municipalities.

Renamo's strategic political line began to change in 2011–2012. After disastrous results in the 2009 general elections (Renamo obtained 16% of the vote, against 75% for Frelimo and its new candidate, Guebuza), Dhlakama tried to revitalize Renamo's ranks. In the National Council held in Nampula in 2012, decentralization became an asset of its new political strategy; this option was confirmed and radicalized in 2014 at the Third National Conference of Renamo, when the war against the Mozambican government had again resumed. In these circumstances, Dhlakama was allowed to propose a separation of Mozambique north of the river Save (Raiva, 2014). Or, as an alternative, an advanced form of federalism.

Since then, the local question has become the main political issue on the public agenda of Mozambique. After long negotiations, periods of war in central Mozambique, failed conversations, and Dhlakama's death in May 2018, a final agreement was signed between President Nyusi and the new Renamo's President, Ossufo Momade, in August 2019 (Voaportugues, 2019). The two key elements of this new agreement exerted considerable influence on the political elections of 2023: DDR (a process of disarmament and demobilization of Renamo's army) and the timely reform of Mozambique's constitution (approved in 2018). In the first case, Renamo was forced to become a 'normal' political party and could no longer use military blackmail: Renamo had to compete against Frelimo (and all the other parties) on pure electoral terms. In the second case, many innovations were introduced: provincial governors were now elected, and no longer appointed by the President of the Republic. This was a victory for Renamo, which intended to govern those provinces where it used to win provincial elections. Nevertheless, Frelimo introduced a new element: the election had to be indirect. This proposal was well received by Renamo, as it allowed the two main political parties to have more political clout than the candidates. Frelimo also introduced another position, that of the Provincial Secretary of State, appointed by the Chief of State. The aim of this unusual role was clear: to control the elected Governor, sharing with them the power at the provincial level.

Indirect elections were also applied to the municipalities. Then, for the first time, in 2023, mayors were elected through a vote of the municipal assembly. The municipal group of the winning party had to designate its list head as a mayor but leaving the party the theoretical chance to elect another of its representatives. Finally, the constitutional reform provided for the establishment of elected districts, whose leaders had until then been appointed by the central government. This measure was withdrawn by Frelimo in 2023, with the justification that the time was not yet ripe for such a move (Anjos, 2023). In reality, this was a new strategy to avoid full decentralization, which would have seen Renamo rule in many districts currently in the hands of Frelimo.

The following sections seeks to illustrate how Renamo's interest in local elections influenced the general political scenario, especially the 2023 elections, as highlighted by some scholars (Hankla and Manning, 2017).

Municipal elections in Mozambique: historical overview

The first municipal election in 1998 was boycotted by Renamo, making it easy for Frelimo to win all 33 municipalities. However, in 2003, Renamo participated in the local elections. Dhlakama prepared with care: in Beira, the young Daviz Simango imposed himself as the new man of the Mozambican opposition. Simango, the son of former Frelimo vice-president Uria Simango, executed together with his wife, Celina, in the re-education camps by the socialist regime of Samora Machel, belonged to a small political formation which, in alliance with Renamo, won in Beira against Frelimo. Renamo’s successes did not stop in Beira: in the same Sofala province, Renamo’s candidate was elected as mayor in Marromeu, and Renamo candidates were also elected in Nacala Porto, Ilha de Moçambique and Angoche in Nampula province. Good results were registered in Quelimane, Mocimboa da Praia, Nampula and Monapo, while in the south Frelimo’s monopoly was evident. Renamo was able to elect five mayors: a new political landscape was seen in Mozambique. For the first time, an opposition political party assumed governmental responsibilities, albeit at the local level.

Since 2003, municipal elections have become an important democratic moment in Mozambique. While Renamo (and MDM, after its official establishment in 2009) have had mixed fortunes in general elections, at the local level things were different. In 2008, opposition parties conquered only the municipality of Beira (even if Simango was elected as an independent candidate, due to his political fallout with Dhlakama), but Frelimo dominated in the other municipalities (which now numbered 43). In 2011, Frelimo ordered three mayors to resign and hold elections. Renamo decided not to run for these offices. In the most important of these, Quelimane, MDM, with Manuel de Araújo, won the election. All these municipal elections were characterized by peacefulness, relative tolerance, and lack of violence (Nuvunga, 2012). The interplay of the parties seemed well defined: Renamo, with Dhlakama, used to protest that it did not accept the election results, but without implementing violent actions or staging public demonstrations by its supporters. In short, the game of the parties seemed to work: Frelimo ceded some political space to the opposition parties, while the latter were content to administer a few towns, with no major pretensions to hold power at the central level. The pact seemed to hold.

This pact, however, was preventing any chance of Renamo competing as equals with Frelimo, even more so after 2008, when Simango, following his victory in Beira, founded a new party (MDM) which began to compete with Renamo to become the main opposition party. At the local level, MDM enjoyed significant successes in 2013, when it won four cities, Beira, Quelimane, Gurué and Nampula, even coming close to victory in Maputo, with Venâncio Mondlane.

Given the new conflict, Renamo boycotted the 2013 local elections. This was an unmistakable signal that Dhlakama was choosing an extra-institutional path of confrontation with Frelimo: military conflict would prevail over political competition. The implicit pact between Chissano and Dhlakama was overwhelmed due to Guebuza’s project to carry out a ‘final solution’ in relation to the Renamo question. In response to Guebuza’s aggressive attitude, Dhlakama considered the threat of arms to be the only mode of relationship that the current Mozambican president could understand (Sousa, 2013).

Despite the death of Dhlakama in May 2018, his strategy worked: Renamo returned to its position as the key opposition, over the MDM, as the general elections of 2014 and 2019 showed. The death of Daviz Simango during the COVID-19 pandemic left MDM without its founder and leader, weakening the political ambitions of Mozambique's third-largest party (Mapote and Miguel, 2021). In the meantime, the main local MDM leaders (Venâncio Mondlane, Manuel de Araújo and others) passed into the ranks of Renamo, marking the beginning of a renewed commitment to the local level from Renamo.

The 2018 local elections saw Frelimo win 44 municipalities, while Renamo won eight and MDM one (Beira). In important municipalities such as Matola, but also Monapo, Alto Molocue and Moatize, Frelimo's margin of victory over Renamo was less than 1%. The new Renamo leader, Ossufo Momade, alerted Frelimo that its party could break off the ongoing negotiations with the government if evident fraud was detected (Matias, 2018). Despite a leadership considered as weak, compared with that of Dhlakama, the 2018 municipal elections represented a turning point for Renamo. First, within Renamo, awareness of the importance of local elections was now well established. Second, this awareness was stimulated by the presence of important public figures (Venâncio Mondlane, Manuel de Araújo and António Muchanga) who saw success in local elections as the only way to affirm their political potential. Third, the government of President Nyusi seemed weakened, due to financial scandals that brought the country to its knees (Cortes et al., 2021) and the war in Cabo Delgado carried out by Islamic-based terrorist groups, which succeeded in blocking Total's large and promising gas investments (Bussotti and Coimbra, 2023).

For the first time, Renamo was competitive in some municipalities of the south, as occurred for Venâncio Mondlane in 2013 for the municipality of Maputo, when he represented MDM. António Muchanga, Renamo's candidate for Matola, probably won the local elections in Maputo; nevertheless, the CNE (National Electoral Commission) attributed the victory to Frelimo's candidate, despite the presence of three different ballot bulletins, which should have caused CNE to at least rerun the elections (Massango, 2018). Similar situations occurred in other municipalities, especially in central and northern Mozambique, such as Moatize, Alto Molocue, Marromeu, Monapo, Tete, Milange and Chimoio, where Renamo and MDM contested the final results. Credible independent reports speak of a climate of 'continuous intimidations of voters and opposition candidates' (Hanlon, 2018).

The municipal elections of 2018, together with the general elections of 2019, have been considered – along with those of 1999 – to be the worst elections in the history of Mozambique. As one example, Renamo and MDM called for the results of the general elections in 2019 to be cancelled due to massive fraud, that the international community for the first time recognized, starting with the Commonwealth, to which Mozambique belongs (CAT, 2020).

A turning point: the municipal elections of 2023

The municipal elections held in 2023 represented a turning point in the electoral history of Mozambique, due to various reasons:

1. For the first time, Renamo faced an election without being able to utilize its own army. The peace agreement signed in 2019 between Nyusi and Momade, and subsequent arms surrender and military demobilization, left Renamo as a ‘normal’ party. Competition now had to be exclusively carried out in the political sphere.
2. Consequently, Frelimo felt free of the traditional blackmail Renamo used to wring out minimum guarantees in terms of transparency of electoral processes. Paradoxically, the signing of the peace accords turned into a free pass to set up fraudulent electoral mechanisms, in the knowledge that Renamo could do no more harm.
3. Another new variable was added to this new context: the presence of the Power to the People group, largely underestimated by Frelimo, and used by certain key figures in the local political arena, especially by Renamo, to mobilize as never before the popular masses, for the electoral processes to be respected.

The preparation for the 2023 municipal elections was characterized from the very beginning by rather unusual elements that did not appear to be politically rational.

The human resources investments made by Frelimo and the opposition parties were extremely diverse: Frelimo chose candidates who were not well known and had limited electoral impact. In contrast, Renamo, MDM but also Nova Democracia – whose leader is Salomão Muchanga, the former president of the Youth Parliament – focused on very strong candidates, both from their own ranks and from civil society. This difference was clear even in large cities, starting with the capital Maputo. Here, Renamo sided with Venâncio Mondlane, perhaps the most active and competent member of the Mozambican national parliament, who had already come close to winning as an MDM candidate in Maputo in 2013. In Matola the choice again fell to Muchanga, in Quelimane to the tried-and-true Araújo, in Nampula to the outgoing mayor, Vahanle, and so on.

No one could explain why Frelimo made such unusual choices. In informal conversations with various observers, the assumption emerged that the ruling party wanted to leave its best weapons for 2024 and avoid burning out its leading figures. Others thought that these municipal elections did not represent a significant milestone for Frelimo, which – as seen above – had always left some room for opposition parties to manoeuvre in local elections.

The facts proved these assumptions wrong: Frelimo’s plan was to carry out the biggest electoral fraud in Mozambique’s history. For this, there was no need for prominent figures to be placed as leaders for the various municipalities. Rather, what was needed was a well-oiled electoral machine capable of significantly altering the results that came out of the ballot box. The results that emerged from the first local counts, confirmed by parallel counts performed by various civil society organizations, indicated surprising victories by the opposition parties. Cities such as Maputo and Matola had been won with large majorities (over 55%) by Renamo, while the MDM was confirmed in Beira, and Nova Democracia won the municipality of Gurué, in close competition with Renamo. Other cities in the south, such as Vilankulos, were won by Renamo, while local courts immediately ruled that elections be repeated in Chókwè (Gaza) and Cuamba (Niassa) due to the huge irregularities found (Matende and Matsinhe, 2023).

Through a series of increasingly crude measures, the party-state tried to change the outcomes of elections in all 65 municipalities, deciding – apparently on orders from the Frelimo Central Committee – to leave only the city of Beira to the opposition, as the official decision of CNE confirmed (Integrity, 2023): a city won by a party that posed no threat in the subsequent 2024 elections, the MDM, whose electoral presence was now reduced to Beira alone and a few scattered votes in other significant urban centres. The weekly newspaper *Canal de Moçambique* was able to discover the falsification of minutes of various local election commissions, to the benefit of the ruling party (Canal de Moçambique, 2023).

Faced with the largest electoral fraud in the history of Mozambique, two hypotheses were formulated to explain this: one accentuating the element of surprise on the part of the Frelimo, in terms of civil society's resistance to this wretched operation, which will be discussed later; and a second, in which it was believed that such a disorganized process, starting from the pre-election register of who would be eligible to vote, was done for the purpose of exacerbating unrest. This would have created a situation of widespread urban guerrilla warfare, useful to declare the state of emergence and so postpone the 2024 presidential elections, thus allowing Nyusi to extend his term beyond its natural expiration in 2024 (Tivane, 2023).

If this second hypothesis cannot, to date, be verified, with respect to the first some facts can already be proven and analysed. Probably, those who had orchestrated the generalized voter fraud scheme expected a reaction from the opposition parties, such as had occurred in the past. The episodes during the 1999 general elections, as well as, more recently, Venâncio Mondlane's possible victory in Maputo in the 2013 local elections and Muchanga's victory in Matola in 2018, had not shaken public order in Mozambique to any great extent. There were a few demonstrations, a few routine appeals to the CNE and the courts, but nothing earth-shattering. This time, however, things were different: first, the control of voting was as stringent as ever before. The shibboleth was 'to vote and to stay', in order to avoid votes being altered by local CNE and STAE (Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration) representatives, with the assistance of police agents. Mozambican police immediately responded by imposing another order: 'to vote and to leave' (Oliveira, 2023a). Second, the whole country was paralyzed for weeks by peaceful demonstrations, with popular demonstrations demanding respect for the electoral will of the people. Finally, organizations (such as the Episcopal Mozambican Conference of the Catholic Church, Lawyers Bar Association, and the Islamic Conference) and even leading members of the ruling party, such as Chissano and Samora Machel Júnior (LUSA, 2023), issued significant pronouncements to respect the will of the voters. Such declarations contrasted with what the Frelimo leadership, which was becoming increasingly isolated regarding the management of the electoral process, was doing. The international community also began to take a stand, showing concern about the extent of electoral fraud and the stability and maintenance of peace in the country. The ambassadors of Canada, Sweden and Norway issued a statement advocating for the need for electoral transparency, as this is the basis of any kind of democracy (Integrity, 2023a).

These reactions were made possible thanks to the underground work of the Power to the People youth group. Formed following rapper Azagaia's death in March 2023, these young people – backed by figures such as Venâncio Mondlane or Manuel de Araújo – had

suffered police repression during the first public demonstrations following the artist’s death (RFI/LUSA, 2023), eventually choosing to withdraw from the national scene. This had mistakenly led Mozambican authorities, both political and law enforcement, to believe that the group’s capacity for action was permanently weakened. On the contrary, as testified by members of the group with whom several conversations took place (rapper and social activist André Cardoso and professor and human rights defender, Tírsio Siteo), the choice was to organize low-profile networks, focusing on controlling municipal election votes and mobilizing citizens in favour of opposition candidates, before, during and after elections. For it was impossible to hide the fraud (Oliveira, 2023).

Renamo, for example, organized nationwide protests against election fraud on October 17, while the MDM – along with Renamo – boycotted the opening of the end-of-year parliamentary session, leaving Frelimo alone in parliament (Voaportugues, 2023).

However, those who chose to occupy the squares were the local candidates, especially those of Renamo, sustained by the Power to the People youth network, who peacefully laid siege to the various cities where Renamo had won in the parallel counting of votes, moving the political conflict onto a terrain that no authoritarian regime prefers: the occupation of the physical spaces of cities. Such demonstrations showed – thanks also to the extensive use of social networks and coverage by the private press and TV – the injustice that the party-state was committing. For the first time in such a clear way, all the symbolic and physical violence of the Mozambican state has emerged, captured by a dominant elite which systematically ignores the popular will, maintaining itself in power through the monopoly of legitimate use of force, and no longer having electoral support from the citizens.

The other new element that emerged from the 2023 municipal elections was the beginning of attacks against representatives of the institutions involved in this gigantic fraud. To give a few examples: on October 25, a car belonging to a STAE technician was burnt in Tete (Canal Moz Atual, 2023); some days before the body of Pedro Manguissa was recovered in Milange (Zambezia province), probably in relation to his activity as the president of a local polling station (Afro News, 2023); finally, in Nacala (the second city of Nampula province), a few hours after the official announcement of electoral results by the CNE President, Carlos Matsinhe, a wave of urban riots broke out, with public buildings and private cars being destroyed. These attacks may end in real urban guerilla warfare when the electoral process is finally closed with the pronouncement of the Constitutional Council. At the time of writing no pronouncement has yet been made.

Conclusions

The 2023 municipal elections represented a turning point for Mozambican politics. As shown in this article, the implicit pact between Frelimo and Renamo that had governed the country during Chissano’s presidency was broken initially by Guebuza, then by Nyusi and Makonde’s governance. When Dhlakama died in 2018, negotiations between the two parties were occurring. The solutions under Momade’s presidency were not as satisfactory as hoped. Frelimo was able to impose various clauses, including the postponement of district elections, which were one of Renamo’s key demands for a long-awaited profound decentralization of the country.

Paradoxically, the signing of the peace agreement in 2019 helped destabilize the country. The implicit pact was based on the fact that Renamo could have its own army, through which it could determine the level of acceptance of the electoral fraud carried out by Frelimo. Once the disarmament process was completed, this weapon was no longer available, and Frelimo thought it had *carte blanche* to organize the most fraudulent elections in the history of Mozambique, without any serious threat from the opposition. Nevertheless, Frelimo did not consider another variable: that of the People in Power informal network, associated with the protagonism of some local opposition figures.

Underestimating this element has led to a situation that has destroyed the credibility of all the country's institutions, and in particular those that should have guaranteed the impartiality of the electoral process. It also made us understand the openly authoritarian traits of the Nyusi government, completely disinterested in transposing the will of the voters, in favour of maintaining power at all costs. It finally opened – indeed accentuated – an internal struggle within the majority party, from which a relatively new figure emerged: Samora Machel Júnior, who could represent the real alternative within Frelimo for the 2024 elections, to the Makonde system of power which has dominated the country for the last 10 years.

The opposition of the 2023 local elections demonstrated, if there was ever any need, the insufficient action of the traditional opposition parties compared to the excessive power of Frelimo. Without the intervention of the Power to People network, the political situation in Mozambique would probably have remained unchanged. The breaking of the implicit pact signed by Nyusi and Momade, after the Chissano-Dhlakama one collapsed due to Guebuza's aggressiveness towards Renamo, by an element external to the traditional political-institutional dialectic, opens the way for solutions that were unthinkable until a few months ago. The 2023 elections have shown that the opposition (especially if united, unlike what happened in the last municipal elections) probably represent a majority in the electorate of the country. Nonetheless, to win they need the support of active civil society organizations and networks, and above all of leadership receptive to new requests coming from a large part of the Mozambican population, in particular young people. Such a coalition is not easy to make, but is possible today, given Frelimo's disastrous results in the 2023 municipal elections, despite the official results approved by CNE.

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ANGOLA IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA – FOREIGNERS 'ENERGY SECURITY' FIRST?

David Sogge and Bob van der Winden



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and
Bob van der Winden**

Introduction

As with many others in the non-Western world, Angolans have never been allowed time and space among themselves freely to contest and shape their society and politics. After more than 400 years without solitude, Angola is today more confined than ever in a predatory world system. This fact, emphasised in our contributions in earlier stages of the project *Democratization and Development Processes in Angola and Southern Africa*¹, has lost none of its salience in affecting prospects that Angola’s political economy might someday respond equitably to all Angolan citizens. In this chapter, we reflect critically on our earlier observations, consider today’s realities, and conclude with a look ahead. We make occasional reference to Mozambique, where extractive capitalism also looms large. By doing so, we hope to put some lessons from this project into bolder relief.

Framing the Issues

In this article we locate Angola’s political economy in a framework of nested arenas, loosely-bounded spheres of relational and discursive power. This was the approach adopted in our earlier contribution (Sogge, van der Winden and Roemersma, 2009). A political arena like Angola’s is constituted by sub-arenas of military, economic, state, and civil bodies. Some of these operate transnationally, hence Angola’s arenas are at the same time subject to arenas beyond those constituted domestically. In these transnational arenas, states, corporations, offshore financial bodies and inter-state organisations set the rules and contest for power to change the rules, sometimes challenged by civil and uncivil organisations. We underlined ways in

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which Angola’s economy, culture and politics are ‘extraverted’, its governance increasingly ‘de-nationalised’, especially in crucial matters of fiscal and monetary policy (Sogge, 2015, citing Sassen, 2006). These concepts help foreground the extractive industries and the rents flowing from them. These accumulate chiefly outside Angola, to the detriment of public politics and governance for Angolan citizens on home ground.

Looking Back

In our 2009 analysis of Angola’s politics and governance, we noted the following.

The ruling party-state enjoyed a near-monopoly of power on home ground. To win elections and recruit cadres it relied on its longstanding, largely urban constituencies. Yet this perpetuated social and political fractures. Urban middle classes and (semi-)proletarians rallied to the MPLA, while rural, black, agrarian strata rallied mainly to UNITA and other opposition parties. Ethnic and regional affiliations, reinforced by socio-economic class status, influenced a wide range of policies and practices.

In their management of power, the MPLA and its corporate allies used oil rents for patronage, coercion, co-optation and competition. This included semi-colonization of civil spheres (Abreu, 2008) through Party-affiliated NGOs, and creation of official bodies such as human rights commissions and an ombudsman. These measures helped to neutralize dissent and suppress potential rivals. Health and education services for most citizens suffered further neglect, while private schools and clinics, including many abroad, catered for the elite. To cushion some hardships the party-state relied on non-governmental bodies supported from abroad. Hence instead of a solid array of public services and protection which citizens could claim as entitlements, there arose an unstable array of unaccountable service providers, some of them in an increasingly privatized domain available only to the better-off. This kind of minimalistic and arbitrary welfare provision works to diminish citizen readiness to claim more and better – a demobilizing factor we failed to mention but is now evident from studies elsewhere (e.g., Holland, 2018).

Western donors and mainstream media occasionally expressed dismay about official neglect of the poor and about heavy-handed action against civil protest. Major western aid agencies praised NGOs and other formal civil society bodies (many reliant on foreign monies), and provided some of them with modest, often fluctuating funding in order to signal their virtue and to keep alive a semblance of countervailing power. But for international bodies like the IMF and private corporations, an active, politicized citizenry and a robust social contract were not on the agenda. Indeed, serious shifts of power were for them unwelcome.

We concluded then:

Protection, confidence and information needed to mount advocacy efforts are nowhere guaranteed in Angola. (...) The balance of forces in the public arena today is tilted overwhelmingly against emancipatory initiatives in civil domains. The interests of the producers and consumers of hydrocarbons (and other sectors, especially financial services, serving producers and Angolan elites) have priority, severely constraining research, debate and protest at both national and global levels (Sogge, van der Winden and Roemersma, 2009).

Looking forward from 2009 we stated:

Public space for associational life is also without question a good thing. But a responsive state, built around public services and the active pressure of constituents (consumers and producers) to make them work well, seems to us to be an even more pressing and probably more feasible objective in the middle run. Therefore, a chief priority for foreign support should be those organisations actively enlarging public space and fighting in the public arena, as well as to the means (e.g. media, communication) that *de facto* enlarge and protect the public domain (Sogge, van der Winden and Roemersma, 2009).

This being so, despite the government’s near-total control over domestic media. However we did envision potential sources of civic education via Internet-based media, drawing in Angolan diasporas, policy activists and scholars.

We drew attention to Angola’s continuing extraversion and the importance of factoring in the roles of powerful outsiders when assessing prospects for democratic practices and a decent social contract. Given that organisations are nested in a globalised pattern, and that Angolan elite interests are anchored offshore, strategies of countervailing power increasingly have to be made relevant at those global levels, we wrote, and concluded:

Improving the responsiveness of domestic elites and their global allies will require confronting them in the domestic arena but especially in the global arena, where transparency, anti-corruption and good governance are needed more than ever. (Sogge, van der Winden and Roemersma, 2009).

In the balance today

Despite pledges to curb them, fossil fuels continue to loom large over the world’s political economy and its increasing disorder (Thompson, 2022). Oil from Angola, and as from 2010 gas from Mozambique (Rawoot, 2020), command the attention of corporations and the governments who subsidise them. In the West, those powerful bodies have long exalted the virtues of competition, a stance easy to adopt in the absence of serious rivals. But today they face real competition in the form of Chinese political and economic enterprise. Wars in Ukraine, Palestine, Sudan and Syria, with resulting economic shocks have only intensified struggles for ‘energy security’ pivoting on fossil fuels. International patron-client alliances are a result. Dependence on fossil fuels and their rents help account for the high degree of foreign official and corporate tolerance of ruling oligarchies in Angola and Mozambique, who are their reliable clients.

Following the investiture in 2017 of Joao Lourenço as President, the Angolan government rolled out a series of measures intended to accommodate foreign capital, chiefly in facilitating access to lucrative activities and assets and in de-risking private investment. It faced calls to seize the moment and act decisively. From a Western citadel of economic power came urgent advice that Angola had “a historical and relatively short political window of opportunity to push a critical mass of difficult and necessary reforms across a broad front” (IFC, 2019: xx1v). These reforms held that Angola must welcome foreign capital not only *de facto* but also *de jure*. Chief among them were:

- *Private Investment Law* (2018) to facilitate outward transfers of capital and eliminate

- the ‘local partner’ share required under the 2015 version of this law;
- *Competition Law* (2018) to align Angolan statutes with international commercial law and its systems.
 - *AIPEX: Agency for Private Investment and Promotion of Exports* (2018) to facilitate foreign direct investment that may boost, as the name indicates, exports.
 - *Privatization Law* (2019) and its accompanying *PROPIV* system to reduce formal state control over the economy by selling off many major state assets, including the oil giant Sonangol and its subsidiaries, the diamond firm Endiama (already linked with Russian, Israeli and Brazilian capital), the national airlines TAAG, the insurance company ENSA, etc.. By the end of 2022, some 96 firms or other assets had been privatized – fewer than targeted, thus justifying extension of *PROPRIV*’s mandate to 2026.
 - *Public-Private Partnership Law* (2019) to ‘de-risk’ private investors as enabled by the government’s Office for Public-Private Partnerships;
 - *Free Trade Zone Law* (2020) to govern low/no-tax business districts and put a new legal floor under the Sonangol-owned, China-financed ‘Luanda-Bengo Special Economic Zone’, now joined by a no/low tax enterprise zone, the 2800-hectare ‘Uala Agro-Industrial Reserve’. Despite upbeat advertisements about them, however, close studies of these tax-free and regulation-poor zones in the case of Angola (Lippolis, 2022) and worldwide (Slobodian, 2023), point to risks of megalomania, elite self-dealing and poor performance if not failure.
 - *BODIVA*, a fledgling stock exchange gained prominence in 2022, when Banco BAI hoovered up 94 million investor dollars in Angola’s first Initial Public Offering;
 - *EU-Angola Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreement* (2023) intended mainly to streamline authorisations for businesses and facilitate their access to key officials. As of 2021, EU-based interests held assets worth about €14 billion in Angola, while Angolan entities held €3.5 billion in the EU; nevertheless, reciprocal principles are supposed to underpin the agreement (EC, 2023).

Further, in 2022 Angola joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, EITI, a covenant of ‘soft law’ designed to lower risks of reputational damage to the interests of extractive industries. Careful study of EITI since its founding in 2003 reveals that it allows “companies, development banks and trading jurisdictions to more easily legitimate their profit-seeking and supply-focused investments by burnishing the ‘reformist’ reputation of authoritarian and corrupt regimes” (Le Billon & Spiegel, 2022). With encouragement from abroad, further notions of corporate social responsibility, CSR, have begun to circulate, but a survey of small and medium enterprises in Luanda in 2020 led researchers to express concerns as to whether CSR actually affects strategies (Paiva, Sánchez-Hernández & Carvalho, 2023). Donors and national authorities welcome CSR insofar as it burnish reputations of businesses and public authorities but does not expose any of these to rules of formal compliance backed by penalties.

As the government rolled out these and other new laws, policies and agencies, the IMF was more satisfied than ever. Its staff members may quietly express dismay when they

see poor people, but officially the IMF continues to praise the new regime’s policies as “sound” and “prudent” (IMF, 2023) – that is, aligned with IMF preferences. In such praise there’s an element of self-congratulation, given that the fingerprints of the IMF and allied institutions are all over these policies. That is apparent in the intensity of ‘technical assistance’ and ‘capacity building’ furnished by the IMF and World Bank for Angolan policy-makers (IMF 2023, Annex VI). The IMF’s principal shareholder, the US government, also expressed positive views of new externally-oriented policies (US State Dept., 2023). In short, during the first six years of Joao Lourenço’s presidency – celebrated by some as the ‘Laurentian Spring’ – the scaffolding for Angola’s extraverted, market fundamentalist model, co-produced by foreign corporations and national elites, has been extended and consolidated.

This enhanced investor-friendly policy regime also benefits Angola’s upper strata. Established figures (minus the now disgraced Dos Santos family and its close associates) are favoured, perhaps along with some businesspeople beyond the ruling party’s direct patronage. But will benefits come to Angolan citizens on a broad basis? Up to now, IMF-endorsed pledges to combat poverty, promote downward redistribution, achieve greater regional equity and diversify the economy away from petroleum have come to little. Western donors and their banks adhere largely to Washington Consensus’ prescriptions imposed in Africa since the late 1970s (Babb and Kentikelenis, 2021) and with particular force in post-socialist countries since 1991 (see for example Dale and Fabry, 2018), leading in many cases to wider poverty, greater inequality and capital flows to western jurisdictions. In their ambitions to widen the scope and lower the risks for foreign capital, these policies resemble those of the ‘old’ extractive economy of the colonial era.

The IMF assesses Angola’s performance according to many criteria, but among the most important is that Angola must show respect for freedom for global capital. That criterion is: “Not to impose new or intensify existing restrictions on the making of payments and transfers for current international transactions” (IMF, 2022: 95). When drawing up budgets, Angola’s government prioritizes creditors abroad, as demonstrated by two leading Angolan NGOs (ADRA+OPSA, 2022: 7).

In principle, Angola’s government sets priorities through open, democratic processes; in practice, however, democratic oversight and control carry little weight. In its report on consultations with Angolan authorities in 2022, the IMF and other external agencies enjoy far more influence over policies and budgets than do Angolan citizens and their elected representatives. Going by comparative assessments of the International Budget Partnership (IBP), a nonprofit group whose main office is in Washington DC and is supported by major Western donor agencies and philanthropies, Angola’s budget processes get very low rankings. For the budget of 2021, it assessed public participation in Angola at the low end of “insufficient”; it rated official legislative and audit oversight of the budget as “weak”, and termed transparency (public access to documents) as “insufficient” (IBP, 2023).

Other observers share this view. For example in its analysis of the National State Budget, UNICEF Angola (2023: 27) urged the government to “Improve fiscal transparency and financial literacy and to promote more opportunities for interaction with civil society.” A civic watchdog, the Angolan Citizens’ Platform on Public Debt (@pacdp_oficial), has

exposed executive neglect of parliamentary-approved spending targets, such as for military purposes and allocations (“Direct Adjustments”) earmarked for corporations such as Grupo Carrinho, Omatapalo, GEMCORP and the Israeli Mitrelli Group.

Meanwhile, financial resources continue to flow offshore, largely without Angolan public oversight or serious actions by international authorities. A recent report prepared in alignment with the G7’s intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force, for example, found that Angola “is particularly exposed to capital flight through embezzlement of export proceeds and export mis-invoicing” (ESAAMLG 2023: 119). Laws against illicit flows are on the books, but are rarely if ever enforced. Without calling much attention to them, Western authorities and private interests continue to tolerate and enable illicit financial flows from Angola, mainly to Western entities onshore and offshore. A formidable industry of accountancy and juridical ‘enablers’ does the dirty work, (Shaxson, 2022). Capital flight from Angola exploded in the period 2010-2018, when an estimated at US \$63 billion departed. But because that total does not include sizable losses due to mis-invoicing, actual financial drainage from Angola is probably much greater (Ndikumanana and Boyce, 2022: 18). In net terms, foreign direct investment flows have long been negative. Flows in the years 2014 and 2015 were exceptional in that more foreign direct investment arrived than departed (UN-SDA, 2022; IMF, 2022). Behind legal walls and secure digital systems managed in New York, London, Amsterdam, Dubai and elsewhere, corporate agents and their Angolan partners deal in large streams of money via secrecy jurisdictions. These illicit flows, together with remittance of conventional profits and debt repayments, have long made Angola a net creditor to the world.

Investigative journalists, aided by whistleblowers and hackers, have revealed major instances of capital flight. Explosive revelations emerged from the ‘Luanda Leaks’. Around 2019, the Paris-based anti-corruption watchdog PPLAAF (Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa) handed over more than 700 thousand documents to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) for further investigation. This digital ‘hack’ turned up confidential emails, contracts, spreadsheets, ledgers, audits, incorporation papers, organizational charts, lists of clients with overdue payments for jewels, board of directors meeting minutes and videos, bank loan and other loan agreements, deeds, public contracts, government advisories, invoices, tax advice and tax returns. Over more than eight months, more than 120 journalists from ICIJ and 36 media organizations in 20 countries pursued leads in the documents and plumbed their significance. Together, they showed how Isabel dos Santos and her husband, Sindika Dokolo, exploited weak or nonexistent regulations to enlarge their fortune and shield their assets from tax authorities and others, with the support of elite, mostly Western financial service providers, many of them in Amsterdam. Investigative pieces such as ‘How Angolan Elites Built a Private Banking Network to Move Their Riches Into the European Union’ (Sharife & Anderson 2020), have widened public knowledge of Angolan ‘stolen assets’ and triggered formal measures against some of those doing the stealing. Not the least of these measures were carried out by Angola’s post-Dos Santos government. Even the Dutch government began, cautiously, taking steps to crack down on use of Dutch legal gimmicks that enable illicit flows. Yet the Dutch government has yet to ‘walk the talk’ about anti-corruption.

Dutch multinationals have long been active in Angola, and few can claim to have clean hands. The ‘Luanda Leaks’ exposed ways in which Dutch companies such as Van Oord operate. That dredging and land reclamation firm works closely with Dutch state institutions (notably Atradius Dutch State Business, the official export credit agency), the Dutch banks ING and ABN Amro and above all with high officials in Angola. The ‘Luanda Leaks’ exposed plans involving Van Oord for an upmarket urban development project, Areia Branca (White Sands), first proposed in 2010, when President dos Santos took over exclusive control of the area and delegated it to ‘Futungo’, the Presidential Office. It was meant to be part of Luanda’s development plan, where earlier a similar part had been realized, known as Luanda Sul. The plan consisted of shopping centres, hotels, marinas and new homes for the wealthy. Early in 2013 the development plan for the wider Areia Branca area was awarded to the companies Urbinveste and Landscape – both owned by Isabel dos Santos, the former President’s daughter. The result came quickly: one night in June, Angolan police, soldiers, even members of the presidential guard arrived to evict a semi-formal settlement of three thousand fisherfolk, that had been in existence for over fifty years. The eviction force began beating people with clubs, throwing their televisions, generators, mattresses, pots and boat engines into the sea, while shutting down access to the telephone network. This brutal action forced residents into makeshift dwellings in other informal settlements, with no compensation at all (SOS Habitat, 2013). The people were pushed out, but since then no significant investments have taken place and the place remains exactly Areia Branca, white beach and dunes, with no inhabitants. Futungo approved the plan and awarded to Urbinveste and its Dutch partner Van Oord a 615-million-dollar contract to redesign the shoreline close to Areia Branca. The Dutch engineering firm Royal HaskoningDHV assisted Van Oord in matters of project layout. The Dutch bank ING lent 400 million dollars to finance the project and the Dutch official credit agency Atradius insured it. Urbinveste received 189 million dollars, but it is not clear what they exactly did for it. The Angolan presidency paid at least 12 million dollars for these plans. Also involved were Broadway Malyan, a big British design company. Both companies could state later – when the whole set-up had been published by ICIJ – that they had ‘clean hands’: the eviction took place a month before they got involved. This way also the banks (Banco BIC, Portugal, partly owned by Isabel dos Santos and ING, Netherlands), as well as KPMG (drafting the business plan in 2015 for 315 thousand dollars) as well as PwC (advising tax friendly payment routes through Dubai) and Atradius kept a ‘clean conscience’ and as Broadway Malyan stated: we are ‘committed to operating in a responsible and ethical manner’. Also Van Oord denied responsibility for the evictions: ‘The families were removed before the company became involved in the project’, they said (ICIJ, 2020).

Already in 2012, the Dutch Central Bank had warned local banks and trust offices for dealing with Isabel Dos Santos, who was channelling her assets through nine different private Dutch companies. Routinely ignoring the warnings were several trust offices operating “letterbox” companies, usually consisting of no more than postal addresses.

For their services as facilitators, Dutch trust offices, legal firms and accountancy companies made millions. Control over them was evidently a low priority for the Dutch Government, which routinely regards the Dutch financial sector as a goose laying large golden eggs, regardless of damage to others. Two Leiden University tax experts have

written that the ‘letterbox’ sector “has developed into a flourishing industry with its own lobbying position in politics. Its contribution to Dutch GDP increased from about 0,5% in the mid-1980s to over 3% in recent years.” (Vleggeert and Vording, 2019: 3). Today, such services to politically exposed persons (PEPs) are no longer encouraged. The Dutch Arbitration Court ruled in 2023 that Isabel Dos Santos had illegally obtained 52,6 million dollar in dividends from Angola’s oil company Sonangol, just days before the new President João Lourenço fired her as Sonangol’s Board Chair (ICIJ, 2023). At the request of the Angolan government, the international police body Interpol put Dos Santos on a ‘Red List’ calling for her arrest. The Angolan government is suing her for 1.1 billion dollars.

Dutch law and the legal and financial services that make use of it – and that lobby vigorously to shape laws – are not alone in helping plunder Angola’s wealth. Indeed there is vigorous competition among firms using onshore and offshore systems under Western jurisdictions. Such beggar-thy-neighbour stances help account for Netherlands’ very poor score – it is rated 161 of 166 countries – in a recent Sustainable Development Goal ranking of negative ‘spillover’ impacts, which effectively hinder other countries’ social, economic and political improvement (UN, 2023). The point here is that investigative journalists can play powerful roles, especially where plunder requires secrecy, and secrecy enjoys political protection. In exposing these and related episodes of externally enabled theft and abuse of power the work of journalists is vital.

In its agrarian policies, Angola’s post-colonial leadership, whether Marxist-Leninist or market fundamentalist, has never departed from its preference for large-scale, high external-input agribusiness. In the state socialist epoch, its ambition was to create ‘factories-in-the-field’ of Soviet inspiration. At the same time, political and military chieftains quietly relied on hundreds of privately-run farms and ranches originating in the colonial period. In the late 1980s, having jettisoned most state socialist policies and put most loss-making state farms up for sale, Angola opened its doors to transnational firms and consultants, whose entry signalled continuity with the big farm model (Sogge, 1994). In this way, Angola’s rural “dualism” (Pacheco, 2023: 291) was perpetuated with even greater asymmetries: a largely impoverished smallholder sector is structurally eclipsed by an agribusiness sector dependent largely on oil revenues and imported technologies and management.

From an early hour after 1975, there developed a self-reinforcing pattern: strong imperatives and money to import food have combined with political distrust and disdain toward smallholders and rural traders. The MPLA’s benign and not-so-benign neglect (Safarik, 2020) led many rural people to adhere to UNITA or other non-MPLA political movements. In addition, personal avarice among elites (some landholdings and plantation enterprise were in hands of military and security branches or their senior officers) have further helped align Angolan agrarian policies with outside capital.

Some voices in arenas of international governance express concern. UNCTAD researchers have called attention to land-grabbing, arbitrary displacement, and under-utilization of land: “it is estimated that more than one million hectares of land in the whole country have been granted to 48 agriculture and forestry mega projects, but many plots remain unused” (UNCTAD, 2019: 50). Some of these plantations have not dispossessed small-

holders, as that took place already in the colonial era; de Grassi and Ovadia (2017) have exposed that pattern in Malanje province. But other big-scale projects have led to abuse of local smallholders at the behest of national or foreign investors. A comparative sample of 14 ‘mega-projects’ in three provinces studied by Tump and Cassinda (2019) found evidence of official allocations of land to investors with little or no local consultation. More striking were the poor economic results for both Angolan and foreign owners, adverse ecological impacts for local people, and losses for Angolan banks stuck with non-performing loans.

Urban residents, who account for roughly two-thirds of Angola’s population today, have not fared much better. Currently, about three out of five of city dwellers live in peripheral, poorly-serviced shantytowns; twenty years earlier, only one out of five city dwellers lived in them (World Bank, 2023). A recent expert assessment of the country’s first National Urbanization and Housing Programme (NUHP), launched in 2008, reaches disturbing conclusions. Almost all new housing projects, built by foreign firms and routinely financed with foreign loans, fell far short of plans; indeed, some of these new units remained unoccupied for years. Most were built for upper-income families; state help for poor and lower-income people was scant. The expert concludes that “few of the urban poor benefited” from the NUHP, which moreover failed,

to lay the groundwork (...) of building sustainable and equitable cities that leave no one behind. Even Angola’s nascent housing construction sector seemed to have been ‘left behind’. (...) Indeed, our second major finding was that the international private sector was the major beneficiary of construction contracts (Cain, 2021: 202).

Explanations are many, but there is no doubt about the influence of large companies from Portugal, Brazil, China, South Africa and the Netherlands that have long dominated the lucrative infrastructure, construction and building materials sectors. Recently, however, Angolan firms (many of them with strong links with the ruling party as well as with interests abroad) have managed to win contracts and tap capital of both banks and the state (Wanda, Oya and Monreal, 2023). Meanwhile, to house themselves and create sources of income, most Angolans have been left to rely on their own social and economic resources.

As of 2023, the new government had yet to make good its pledges seriously to reduce poverty. When measured in its multiple dimensions, poverty affected about 48 percent of Angola’s population in 2018, up from 32 percent in 2000 (UN-SDA, 2023). New market fundamentalist policies – for example, higher charges for public services, secondary education and transport, and cuts in public sector employment (Razavi et al., 2021) – have further dimmed dreams of improvement for waged and informal sector workers (Schubert, 2022). A European thinktank recently concluded as follows:

Austerity measures negotiated with the IMF in exchange for new loans have pleased lenders and investors but have compounded hardships for ordinary Angolans – the phasing out of fuel subsidies, as well as the introduction of a Value Added Tax (VAT) and of individual income taxes, have hit the poorest part of the population hardest (BTI, 2022).

Recently, however, some countermeasures to alleviate income poverty have begun to

be tested, with help from such bodies as UNICEF. They target very poor or marginalized strata. *Valor Criança*, an EU-supported pilot project of cash transfers for families with children under five, ran from 2019 to 2022, reaching 20 thousand households in three provinces. A larger cash transfer effort, *Kwenda*, began in 2020, backed by a World Bank loan. As of March 2023, about 750 thousand households had received at least one quarterly payment of 25,500 kwanzas (about €29). But public programmes of universal coverage, implying authentic redistribution, are not on the policy agenda. In early 2022, the government announced marginal increases in budgets for education, health, social protection and other public goods. These upward adjustments were opportune for the ruling party, as it faced competition in an election year. But their modest scale was consistent with preferences of the IMF and its financial sector overlords, whose approval opens ways to Western financial markets and official loans.

Nevertheless, such budgetary gestures for social welfare failed to boost the MPLA’s popularity at the polls in 2022. In Luanda province, the ruling party managed to attract only a third of those voting for the National Assembly – a stunning setback for a party that had always taken its urban constituencies for granted. But dissatisfaction is present country-wide. A recent national survey detected weak popular trust (25-30 %) in the President, the National Assembly, the ruling party and opposition parties. Trust in politics and governance is well below the low levels (less than 40 %) measured in 2019 (Afrobarometer, 2022). Such political trends can be attributed to popular discontent with the political class and its serial self-dealing, managed routinely in ‘partnerships’ with foreign firms and aid agencies.

As trust in governing institutions has fallen, political fissures have widened. Political episodes elsewhere in the world, notably the ‘Arab Spring’ uprisings, helped detonate in Angola an explosion of open dissent (Lima, 2013). Inspiring and sometimes leading these displays of civic activism were other actors on terrains of legal protection, journalism, music, religion and ‘netativismo’ (activism through networks), all relying greatly on social media (Ayres & Babo, 2018). Generating the greatest public visibility have been vigils, marches and other non-violent demonstrations, mainly by young people in cities. These met and continue to meet brutal state and corporate repression. For a number of observers, these protests and Angola’s inchoate social movement, represent a departure from the depoliticized climate of “fear, resignation and fatalism for a majority of Angolans” (Blanes, 2021: 125).

In Angola’s associative life, some positive gestures are detectable. In 2021, the government carried out its first ‘participatory budget’ process in all of the nation’s 164 districts. Inspired by experiences in Brazil and backed by donors, that exercise is supposed to engage citizens in setting public investment priorities at local levels. It is far from clear, however, that it genuinely reflects public preferences. A labour law of 2015 clarifies worker rights to organise, bargain collectively and to strike. International trade union organisations regularly express concern about worker rights in Angola (ITUC, 2022). A recent overview concludes:

Independent unions have gradually become more vocal, especially in the education and transport sectors. In the key oil sector, however, workers are poorly unionized and strike attempts are regularly broken up by the Rapid Intervention Police.

However, this same report concludes:

Association and assembly rights are regularly subject to interference and government restrictions. Citizens and associations that criticize the government cannot exercise these rights. (BTI, 2022).

The domestic media landscape has not improved; “Censorship and control of information still weigh heavily on Angolan journalists.” (RSF, 2022). Media freedoms today continue to deteriorate. The watchdog group Reporters Without Borders ranked Angola as 99th of 180 countries in its 2022 survey of media across five criteria of press freedom. In its 2023 survey, it ranked Angola at the 125th place of 180 countries (RSF, 2023).

Donor finance at project levels, where some civic sector organisations scramble to survive, complements donor policies at macro levels. Aid for the civic sector, ‘democratization’ etc. mirrors the justification of aid’s roles in assuring foreigners of ‘energy security’ (“which is after all the basics of Dutch diplomacy” as a Dutch ambassador remarked in a personal communication as far back as 2008). In 2003, a peak year of post-war resurgence, Western aid for Angola, mainly for humanitarian efforts, amounted to more than one billion dollars. This changed in the following decade: in the period 2015-2021, Angola’s net official receipts (of aid and other official flows) totalled a *negative* 730 million dollars, indicating that Angola repaid to OECD countries more than it received from them (OECD, 2023).

Aid earmarked for civil society and local governance has been small and channelled largely through Angolan ministries like that of Territorial Administration; an example is a four-year Spanish-led programme for support to civil society in local governance, funded chiefly by the European Union (FIIAP, 2022). Bilateral aid from the Dutch government in the period 2006-2022 averaged €216 thousand per year, and in recent years has barely exceeded €100 thousand per year. As of 2023, only one project focused on gender, under the rubric ‘government and civil society’ was active (MFA, 2023). Meanwhile, the Dutch, like other donors, subsidize private enterprise with grants, credit lines and trade insurance across a range of Western companies. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO) in the period 2012-2023, at a cost of €4.6 million, supported 55 projects in or related to Angola, of which about four were active as of 2023 (RVO, 2023). Those projects’ impacts on Angolan society have not been studied independently, as far as we know, but it is likely that they fortify Angola’s further insertion in transnational circuits of money and know-how.

Looking Ahead

Across the globe in coming years, anarchic/nihilistic unrest and organised protests look certain to grow. Factors that detonate them differ from place to place, but deep-running forces, as even the OECD has recently acknowledged,

(...) are reinforcing inequalities rather than promoting a fairer distribution of power and resources, and how they are polarising societies rather than mediating between groups to resolve their differences (OECD, 2021: 120).

Given massive inequalities sustained under rentier rule, Angola is an extreme case of these trends. How will they manifest themselves further? In some places they appear not in citizen dissent and rebellion but in withdrawal and depoliticised cynicism. Less

common but more newsworthy are angry nativism and resentment favouring reactionary political and religious movements. Can Angola avoid such dead ends and develop broad support for emancipatory politics and culture? The challenges are many and formidable, also for non-Angolans with stakes in the country’s political and economic fortunes.

We see a continuation of Angola’s “de-nationalised” governance, a term used by political economy scholar Saskia Sassen to refer to the privatization and reorientation of states and political processes to fit agendas of powerful bodies abroad (Sassen, 2006: 222-276). As in the colonial era, real power is anchored abroad, but managed together with Angola elites and institutions of the state. Full sovereignty is a fiction. Its appearance is maintained in both the transnational arena (financial bodies, the ‘international community’ of Western donors and military/security forces, and so forth) and the domestic arena in a hierarchy of state institutions. The strongest of these, notably the central bank and finance ministry, are effectively co-produced with external agencies. Most international civil society organisations with their monitoring and indexes of performance, pay too little attention to de-nationalised governance, and by so doing help to protect it from public scrutiny.

Foreign interests remain decisive in Angolan development strategies, both in content and in presentation. Angola’s Minister of Finance chose to make public the general lines of the National Development Plan 2023-2027 in a public appearance with the Director-General of the IFC, the World Bank Group’s private sector arm. The Minister then stated that “the private sector should be the jewel in the crown” in that national plan. The plan (Angola, 2023) is said to be aligned with about three-quarters of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals; it refers to donor-pleasing notions about gender equality, social inclusion, sustainability and private sector leadership.

For activists and their allies, keeping powerful domestic and foreign interests on the backfoot and answerable for their actions and inactions remains a challenge. Continuing attention to the pillage of Angolan resources, and illicit flows stemming from that pillage will be required. Perpetrators – extractive firms, banks, Politically Exposed Persons and their facilitators in law and accountancy firms merit more investigation and exposés. And those interests continue fighting to preserve their secrets. For example, in November 2022, the EU’s Court of Justice capitulated to offshore and real estate interests when it invalidated the EU’s Anti-Money Laundering Directive that requires EU countries to provide public access to beneficial ownership registers. Needs are thus growing to boost support to organisations that investigate and campaign on a host of issues. These include tax secrecy and illicit flows, extractive sector complicity in social and environmental damage and the furnishing of military and security hardware and software. Whistleblowers have been vital in the struggle for justice in Angola, yet as of early 2022, Angola was the only country in Southern Africa without any laws to protect whistleblowers (UNODC, 2022).

At its outset many decades ago South-South Cooperation promised authentic solidarity and emancipatory politics. Today, however, it is largely a de-politicized pattern of transactions centered on technical and managerial issues, chiefly to serve mercantile and diplomatic aims of richer non-Western donors. That is, it largely mimics the established Western aid industry. The case of Brazilian aid to Angola is typical, as it serves chiefly

to promote and de-risk Brazilian extractive and infrastructure corporations (Dye and Alencastro, 2020). Yet, some Angolan organizations have connected to sister organizations abroad in efforts to transfer organisational know-how and strategies in a number of fields, from low-income community development and local government to nature conservation and public health. Campaigning through ‘Transnational Advocacy Networks’ focused on social and environmental damage by extractive projects has shown results in the case of Brazilian companies in Mozambique (Shipton and Dauvergne, 2021). If well-anchored and protected, such efforts could also carry impact in Angola. Noteworthy on this front is ‘BRICS from Below’, a network-platform that punctures myths about counter-hegemony posed by the likes of Brazil, India and South Africa.

Forward motion of authentic public democracy and the emancipatory camp of Angola’s civil sector will in our view gain less from official donors than from transnational networks of researchers, journalists and activists promoting socio-economic and civil rights, land, housing, environmental justice and related issues. We see that democracy and responsive government can better develop from the bottom up – where possible supported by networks of likeminded people or organizations abroad. Within Angola, a number of initiatives have advanced in recent years to promote civil activism. Among these are consortia of civic organisations, notably ‘Civic Movement MUDEI’ and the Platform South. There have come research efforts, including one led by the Social Sciences Laboratory at the Catholic University of Angola, on civil activism. Longstanding efforts include citizens’ analysis of Angola’s national budget by the *Observatório Político Social de Angola (OPSA)*.

At the same time, research, publicity and solidarity actions abroad, often created or inspired by Angola’s diaspora, including Internet-based news and commentary sources (such as *Club-K* and *Angola Aktuell*) furnish information and moral support to the emancipatory camp of Angola’s civil society. A growing number of investigative projects by journalists linked South-North and South-South point ways forward for transnational cooperation (Schaepman, 2017). A challenge for investigative journalists and policy activists is to avoid dependence on official donors, for whom – as in the case of the Netherlands and most other donor countries – ‘energy security’, and the continued capture of fossil profits and rents, have higher priority than the equitable development.

Angola has seen many decades of under-investment in public services, especially those that promote human flourishing across a broad basis. Neither the leadership (with a few exceptions) nor foreign donors have shown enthusiasm for such investments. In one of its recent statements, the World Bank argues that,

Angola’s most important wealth are its people, who are young (the median age is 17) and can power climate-resilient development across sectors – but only if they are healthy, well-nourished, and properly trained (World Bank Group, 2022: 5).

This sounds beneficent, but it may be fairly asked of the World Bank Group, which for decades has promoted and enforced public austerity and private accumulation, how it intends to shift course and help Angola create a robust basis in public services and human resources. Evidence of any such intention is scarce, while evidence of intentions to de-fund public services is abundant (and compiled by Mackenzie and Sahay, 2023, among others). Monies for ‘social protection’ that were budgeted, authorized and actu-

ally spent by the Angolan government have since 2017, at a time of enhanced IMF and donor influence, broadly declined (UNICEF, 2023b).

Our planet’s climate crisis is already beginning to hammer Angola. Even under conservative American leadership, the World Bank has sounded alarms:

Climate change is not just a future threat, but already a reality in Angola (...) Agriculture will be hard hit... [and] destruction of capital stock due to floods and reduced labour productivity due to higher temperatures are also expected to result in significant headwinds to Angola’s development (World Bank, 2022: 2).

In official documents, Angola’s government appears to show commitment, at least in stating intentions to adapt to the looming crisis. For Angola’s ‘climate refugees’ fleeing south to Namibia due to continuing drought, however, promised adaptation measures will come too late (Martinez, 2022). Angola’s National Development Plan 2018-2022 (Angola, 2018) contained detailed goals and priority actions. Even more detail and reasoning appears in its *National Strategy for Climate Changes 2018-2030* (Angola, 2017). In its mitigation policies, enforcement of existing laws on gas flaring have had, after 2016, some positive effects, but far more could be done (World Bank, 2022: 25). Meanwhile, the government has announced intentions to set up a carbon credit scheme that would attract foreign corporations wishing to offset their emissions through tree-planting. Such a pursuit is remarkable given the poor record of carbon offset schemes worldwide over the past three decades (Stoddard et al., 2021; Greenfield, 2023). Angola’s pursuit of such a scheme is consistent, however, with the leadership’s readiness to follow advice from the bodies such as the World Bank, whose solutions to most problems involve marketization that benefits elites.

Yet sometimes the World Bank is capable of issuing facts and views that squarely contest the primacy of fossil fuels, namely their public subsidies. A recent World Bank report, *Detox Development*, states “Governments are spending trillions on inefficient subsidies that are making climate change worse – money that could be tapped to help solve the problem.” (Damania et al., 2023). Such a message did not stem from the Bank’s own insight and volition but emerged amidst accumulated knowledge and a climate of opinion that civil activists and researchers have built over decades.

Continued use of fossil fuels threatens millions today, and many more tomorrow. From climate and resource activists to the United Nations, calls to de-carbonize and to ‘leave the oil in the soil’ are being amplified. Even some national governments (such as those in the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance) express concern, while financial sector investors show alarm at the prospect of being stuck with ‘stranded assets’ on their hands. What do these appeals imply for Angola? In de-nationalised governance ‘co-produced’ with foreign lenders, these imperatives are acknowledged rhetorically, but with little enthusiasm. On the one hand, the government tells the IMF that its efforts to diversify Angola’s economy beyond oil is a “matter of life or death”. But at the same time, it faithfully follows the World Bank Group’s advice that “investments into new oil exploration are needed” (IFC, 2019: 110). Driven by these and other self-interested incentives, Angola and its corporate collaborators continue along the hydrocarbon path, giving at best sporadic lip service to an alternative strategy. This existential matter hardly figures on the agenda of Angolan civil society organisations.

Fossil fuel industry defenders may scoff at talk of stranded assets, but other observers take the risks seriously. A probing article entitled ‘Unburnable Wealth of Nations’ in an IMF publication highlighted in 2017 an urgent need in fossil fuel export lands to develop other sectors “rather than wait for the next commodity price boom” (Cust, Manley and Cecchinato, 2017). How will progressive Angolans respond when investors lose their appetites for fossil assets, leaving them stranded? A fair process of de-carbonisation is urgently needed. That will require both capturing revenues generated by Angola’s carbon assets, preventing them from fleeing offshore, and putting them to productive uses onshore in Angola. Yet a host of powerful interests, domestic and foreign, oppose that capture and re-purposing of fossil rents. This is a ‘wicked’ political problem, defying easy answers. To help address it, the ‘co-production’ of solidarity between domestic and international forces for social and climate justice will become imperative.

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THE VERTEX OF
THE SOUTH HEMISPHERE
– BETWEEN POPULISM
AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Bruno Ferreira Costa





THE VERTEX OF THE SOUTH HEMISPHERE – BETWEEN POPULISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Bruno Ferreira Costa*

Abstract

Approaching the functioning of the international community implies looking at and understanding the changes in the governance framework of the international state's community and the various existing governance models in a process that has known, throughout the XX and XXI centuries, significant advances.

The current context allows us to verify a remarkable diversity of governance models and the growth of populist and authoritarian alternatives. This trend marks a resistance to the global democratic wave that lacked for being scarce and concentrated in specific geographical contexts. Based on the current literature, we are able to identify causes and stimuli for changes in the structure and functioning of political regimes, but also an opportunity to pinpoint possible reasons that uphold the setbacks associated with the deteriorating quality of democracy in several countries.

This chapter focuses on two topics: discussing the relationship between populism and authoritarianism and deepening the analysis of this movement in the context of the southern hemisphere, aiming to contribute to the political regimes' study in Africa and Latin America.

Introduction

Studying regimes and political systems occupies a central place in the Political Science field. In recent years we have witnessed a significant increase in the number of studies and publications on the diversity of forms of organisation in society and the exercise of political power. These studies focus on three central dimensions: the theoretical perspective on models for exercising political power; the practical

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dimension, in a process of characterisation and detailed description around political regimes and systems; and the comparative aspect, with particular emphasis on differentiated organisation models or what represents an innovative model compared to the dominant literature.

Throughout the XX century, we have witnessed a significant advance of democracy on a global scale, in a process marked by the defence of a set of civil and political rights and greater participation of citizens in public and political life. This process has also been marked by establishing structures and procedures that guarantee the separation of powers in a decisive path towards the affirmation of the democratic model. However, there has not been a linear, single and exclusive path toward affirming democracies. There have been setbacks in the defence of some fundamental freedoms and the rise to power of various extremist groups, and these phenomena are directly associated with periods of economic and social crisis or deep divisions within the framework of political disputes.

The approach to these events becomes a central theme in the context of political science and international relations, in a process that combines the analysis of the causes associated with electoral (or social) support for populist and authoritarian solutions and the study of the proposals presented by the political actors and parties. In this context, it is important to emphasise the importance of ‘reading’ the needs of citizens, creating a programmatic agenda that meets these needs and captures the electoral support necessary to reach positions of power or influence decisions.

Alongside these aspects, emphasis is placed on the charisma dimension of populist and authoritarian leaders, in a process of emotional solid connection between citizens and political leaders, with particular emphasis on political communication and persuasion and propaganda strategies. The entire political debate is influenced by the media agenda and the speed with which information circulates. This reality has allowed various parties and political movements to assert themselves outside the traditional networks of power, challenging, precisely, that same power.

Although one can analyse the success and failure of these new political movements by the ability to exercise or influence power, the dimension of analysis of these new movements requires a more transversal look at the specific characteristics of regimes and political systems and the historical setting and society in question.

The study of regimes, political systems, and political ideologies implies an interdisciplinary approach both in the domain of institutions and in the context of the affirmation of new leadership and the citizens’ (electorate) reaction to new governance models.

However, we will focus the debate in this chapter on the dynamics between the approach to populism and authoritarianism within the framework of the international political system. One of the first points is related to the need to revisit the very concept of ‘populism’, noting the variety of contributions and perceptions about the values associated with this ideology¹. This multiplicity of visions obliges us to follow a path based on the need to integrate a broader look at the theoretical frameworks of populism and

¹ It should be noted that the perspective of the existence of a populist ideology is not consensual, being the subject of debate on the possibility that we are facing a “quasi-ideology”, marked by a division between two groups of society: the people and the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004).

the various examples of the applicability of these theoretical assumptions in a journey, essentially from the second half of the XX century to the present moment.

Based on the existing diversity, it is essential to spare the use of the term ‘populism’ in the context of the political-electoral game, where there is an imminently negative and derogatory tone when associated with populist ideas, which did not always happen. The characterisation of the concept was, for many years, associated with a division of power between groups that made up societies, emanating this struggle from the will and decision of the people.

This contribution focuses on two dimensions: the debate around the concept of ‘populism’ and its relationship with the emergence of authoritarian regimes and the analysis of populist and authoritarian regimes in the southern hemisphere, with particular emphasis on the Latin American region and the African continent.

Populism and Authoritarianism – from the theoretical basis to conceptual elasticity

The debate around the emergence and affirmation of populism has been the subject of multiple contributions, and we have chosen to focus our contribution on the field of Political Science. This does not invalidate the possibility of discussing the concept using contributions from other areas of knowledge. Still, the need to circumscribe the prism of analysis leads us to confine this contribution within the framework of Political Science, more specifically through the resources and the examples registered since the second half of the XX century.

We recognise the importance and contribution of the historical approach to the concept, namely through the approach of the populist movements in the Russian Empire and the United States of America, in the framework of the second half of the XIX century. These movements stood out for the existence of a popular struggle against political elites and the concentration of powers. The struggle of the agrarian movement significantly marked the process. This movement was divided between the need to adapt to new market rules and a strategy associated with victimisation within the framework of a capitalist system. We therefore set a path centred on divisions and struggles between groups that make up society within a framework of exercising or influencing the exercise of power.

The current framework does not fail to resort to this historical contribution to understanding the applicability of the concept. However, it is important to deepen the scope of the concept within the framework of contemporary political systems. The concept was regularly used after the end of World War II to characterise various movements and political leaders that emerged in Latin America because of popular mobilisation in face of economic deprivation and desire to combat the current status quo (Tella, 1965).

This characterization of movements in Latin America, as well as the analysis carried out on the governance model, fostered the negative perspective associated with the concept, and, until the mid-twentieth century, the concept was understood positively, as a mechanism to characterize the pretensions of a particular group of the population (symbiosis between political actors and their fellow citizens).

This conceptual framework, associated with a positive or negative aspect of the concept, has contributed to the existence of a profound debate on populism, which was marked by the complexity of finding a space of understanding in academia that can strengthen the ideology and its applicability to more political contexts. We are faced with a polysemic concept, where multiple visions are being linked in theory and practice, which leads to greater difficulty in finding common understandings about populism in the near future (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018).

This is a cumulative concept, i.e. aggregating different contributions and perspectives, being addressed within the framework of several scientific areas, namely the need to frame the study of populism to understand the changes and the registered political phenomena (Weyland, 2001), in a process marked by a strong influence of the socio-economic dimension and the living conditions of citizens. This path was visible in the first decades after the Second World War. From the 1980s onwards there was the emergence of populist movements based on different motivations, namely the issues of nationalism, the defence of national sovereignty and an attempt to emphasize social and cultural differences as justifications for the adoption of certain public policies.

Within the existing literature, we can identify three distinct conceptual perspectives that mark the development of studies on populism, namely: the ideational, the political-strategic and the sociocultural (Kaltwasser, Taggart, Ochoa Espejo and Ostiguy, 2017).

The ideational aspect corresponds to a vision based on the definition of populism as ‘a set of ideas that not only portrays society as divided between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elite”, but also affirms politics as a mechanism for respecting sovereignty popular’ (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2018: 1669). In this context, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018) highlight the path leading to a more constant and coherent use of the ideational perspective, highlighting that the various contributions constitute a complementary and cumulative path to understanding populism. In the same framework, Norris and Inglehart (2019: 4) perceive populism as ‘a style of rhetoric that reflects first-order principles about who should govern, claiming that legitimate power rests with the people and not with the elites’.

Through the present contributions, we can understand populism as a belief system of limited scope, both because of the differences about other ideologies, and because it assumes a simpler conceptual aspect (*thin-centered ideology*), without the capacity to provide a set of answers to central questions about the functioning of society (Freeden, 2003; Mudde, 2004).

Therefore, populism is framed as an ideology under construction, and it becomes necessary to create a coherent and structured body of ideas and theoretical assumptions to affirm populism as an ideology (Gerring, 1997).

The second dimension, the political-strategic, is based on the aspect of political action, more specifically in the domain of the discursive aspect, and there are several models of affirmation of populism regarding the mode and content of action. Therefore, we still find some gaps in the study of populism and the different phases of the affirmation of democracy on a global scale (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017), which results from the debate around the affirmation of populism as an ideology, but also of the different characteristics of the democratization waves.

In this context, we highlight the contribution of Laclau (2004: 105) in the study of the different dimensions to understand populism, namely the need to study populism through small groups (small scale), the ability to analyze populism through the articulation of social, political and ideological content, and the impact produced, namely in the way political actors are represented.

It is noted that the operationalization of populism as an ideology and as a political strategy constitutes one of the most solid ways to understand the debate around the concept, considering that a set of factors have been assisting the emergence and consolidation of populist movements, namely the crisis of representation, disbelief in democracy, the influence of the media and the effects of the economic and social crisis (Kriesi, 2015).

The third approach (sociocultural) highlights the formative aspect of political agents and actors, characterized by a distinct action from traditional political actors; a theatrical dimension associated with the political game (Ostiguy, 2017). This type of action or political strategy aims to reach different target audiences, as well as ensure the leadership of the media agenda, controlling or influencing the news process in the country.

However, it should be noted that all the conceptualization associated with populism is influenced by the analysis of regimes and political systems in Latin America in the second half of the XX century, namely the perspective of a division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, in a process that went beyond the mere division in the perspective of class struggle or citizens of certain regions (Knight, 1998). That is, there was a way for a theoretical affirmation of the concept that did not apply to a mere dichotomy associated with a given context.

One of the main contributions is presented by Weyland (2001), who identifies three perspectives to define (theoretically) populism: the cumulative perspective, the radial perspective, and the classical perspective. The characterization of Latin American governments made it possible to verify the existence of contributions based on the cumulative perspective, a concept built using multiple scientific areas, making it difficult to build a coherent argument applicable to different realities. The radial aspect is based on the definition of a set of characteristics specific to populism, with Kenneth Roberts (1995) identifying five essential traits: the existence of a personalist and paternalistic leadership, a heterogeneous political and interclass coalition, the existence of a ‘top-down’ strategy in the process of political mobilization, the existence of an amorphous or eclectic ideology and an economic project based on the principle of redistribution.

The classical dimension is the one that contributes to greater harmonization in terms of understanding populism, making use of the framework of populism in political science, which would be understood as a specific way of exercising political power (Weyland, 2001). Populism ‘is more than a rhetorical style and a political protest (...) a political theory of populism has to focus on populism in power, or on how populism interprets, uses and changes representative democracy’ (Urbinati, 2019: 113).

Alongside populism, we note a growing interest in the analysis of authoritarian regimes, not only in revisiting the authoritarian regimes registered in the 20th century but due to the need to analyze how various states maintain authoritarian models of exercising power today.

This interest is even more evident when there is a debate around a distinction between authoritarian populism and democratic populism (Norris and Inglehart, 2019) and a process of affirmation from authoritarian populism in several countries.

The way to understand the dynamics of authoritarian regimes in a global context of progressive democratization, corresponds to a significant challenge in political science. The end of the XX century and the beginning of the XXI century allowed for notable progress to be made in terms of the transformation of political regimes, however, recent years have seen examples of a setback in terms of democratic values and principles, which may result from an adaptation of authoritarian leaderships to the new forms of assertion on the political stage, namely through processes of sharing power or responsibilities (Svolik, 2009).

If we pay attention to the evolution of democracies in the global context, namely the process characterized by the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991), we see a ‘snowball’ effect in terms of the modelling of political regimes. However, when observing the predominance of authoritarian regimes, there is a concentration of them in the African continent, in a process that can be explained by the failure of globalization, by the difficulties of ensuring a democratic model applied to different political, social, economic, and cultural contexts and the strong income disparities in these countries (Kaplan, 2014).

Associated with this dynamic is the proliferation of populist and authoritarian ideas in the Fragile States², and even in this reality there are notable differences in the consequences of the impact derived from the emergence of revolutionary movements or those that challenge existing institutions through multiple socio-political dynamics. (Kaplan, 2014). We can find fertile ground in these States for the dissemination of populist movements. Still, the path must go through the reinforcement of studies that focus on the political, economic, and social reality of these countries, allowing us to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between populism and authoritarianism and between populism and the instability of political regimes.

The analysis of the concept of authoritarianism also follows the evolution of the XX century, and the characteristics and scope of the concept marks the debate. The concept applies to ‘three contexts: the structure of political systems, psychological dispositions about power and political ideologies’ (Bobbio, Matteucci and Pasquino, 1998: 94). From the point of view of the structure, emphasis is given to the appreciation of government authority to the detriment of consensus solutions, with this process being marked by a lesser relevance given to representative institutions (Bobbio, Matteucci and Pasquino, 1998).

In this field of operationalization of the concept, there is a perspective centred on the power assigned or exercised by a leader or a reduced group of actors, and the model violates democratic principles, being characterized by a reduced (or limited) political pluralism. Even if the existence of opposition political forces is registered or verified, they are limited in action, often the existence of these forces corresponds to the objective of ensuring a ‘false appearance of democracy’, a determining aspect of the relationship between states in the international community.

² The classification of Fragile States can be consulted in the “Fragile States Index” – <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>. Accessed on February 18th, 2023.

1. Populism, authoritarianism, and the space of democracy

The approach to the phenomenon of populism refers to a cross-sectional historical view, covering the last two centuries, and we have witnessed a multiplication of studies on populism in the last two decades, now focusing on the theoretical and conceptual aspects (Müller, 2017; Pappas, 2016; Brubaker, 2017; Urbinati, 2019), sometimes focusing on the applicability and objective characterization of populist movements and leaders (Jagers and Walgrave, 2008; Aslanidis, 2016). The diversity of studies has given rise to a broad debate on the matrix of populism. Some contributions have validated the possibility of populism being a foundation for fostering the inclusion of marginalized social groups or increasing political participation, boosting citizens' political/civic participation, which would correspond to strengthening the democratic pillars (Laclau, 2004). In other words, populism would assume a neutral nature, open to be used in democratic and non-democratic contexts, which frees the analysis from 'ideological shackles' and the usual stances of the political-electoral dispute.

There is the affirmation of multiple paths regarding the form of organization of society, while the same could not be said regarding the affirmation of liberal democracy as the goal of the societal organization of the international community. The way forward is to study and analyze the functioning of political regimes within a framework of organizational diversity and in the face of the multiplicity of facts and political phenomena that have fuelled the emergence of an anti-systemic and populist discourse.

Thus, different currents have contributed to the study of populism, both from a theoretical and practical analysis of regimes based on the principles and values indicated above. While it is true that these perspectives do not limit or circumscribe future analyses in a closed way, they allow us to contribute to a path based on the debate between the main authors and theoreticians who study the different forms of populism.

Addressing the various contributions of populism, we can identify two groups of scholars, one focusing on the conditions leading to populism, namely the adjacent economic and social aspect, and the second group focusing on the political aspect of populism (Urbinati, 2019). While there has been a process of consolidation and expansion of democracies globally, there have been resistance movements and the emergence of anti-establishment political parties, challenging the status quo and a set of prevailing democratic premises.

While this dichotomy (*status quo*/systemic challenge) can be noted, there is the emergence of several governments based on populist ideas/policies (Weyland, 2001; Mudde, 2007; Pappas, 2014a; Şahin, Johnson and Korkut, 2021), which signifies a capacity for populist leaders to act within the democratic system. This perspective may embody the path toward the establishment of a breakdown in democratic systems, that is, the very functioning of democracy allows for the existence of actors who end up questioning democratic principles and values.

To understand the dynamics and different perspectives associated with populism it is important to bear in mind the economic, social, cultural, and religious diversity of each context, since the terrain for the emergence of populism and the conditions surrounding it are very diverse. Although context can make a difference, in a democratic system

political decisions and choices must be validated by the electorate, and citizens play a decisive role in the approval or rejection of political programmes or measures.

It can therefore be said that populism 'coexists', in certain contexts, in a healthy way with democratic rules, submitting itself to popular scrutiny and accepting the interplay of forces resulting from elections. This process also results from the professionalisation of political action, and various populist leaders have effectively used the various information networks available (traditional and digital), allowing them to expand the reach of their message. The use of social networks and alternative information media has allowed them to reach an audience far removed from traditional political activity. The media have become, with the widespread use of the Internet, the privileged stage for political discussion, allowing direct communication (without intermediaries) between political actors and citizens (Langlois, Elmer, McKelvey and Devereaux, 2009).

In the framework of the consolidation of democracies, we can identify a set of fundamental traits, namely: the opposition to capitalism and a certain model of globalisation, the struggle against the elites in power (people versus elites), an opposition to immigration or too flexible models of immigration and the constant defence of the principle of popular sovereignty (Martynov, 2017). Naturally, the ideological orientation influences the thematic grid adopted, and, for example, populism associated with right-wing parties focuses the discourse on the themes of traditions and the family. In contrast, populism associated with left-wing parties focuses the discourse on the economic aspect and opposition to capitalism.

Considering these assumptions, it is important to bear in mind a central question: what is the impact of populism or authoritarianism in the process of erosion or deconstruction of democracies? At this point, populism 'can coexist' within the democratic framework. At the same time, the affirmation of authoritarian regimes/models represents a path opposed to constructing a democratic model, representing the antithesis of the principles associated with democracies. However, this does not prevent various democratic elements or rules from existing within the framework of authoritarian regimes, namely as a function of some international pressure or the attempt by the political leaderships of these regimes to appear democratic.

While analysing and evaluating democratic regimes we have witnessed an effort to develop and present comparative frameworks that can help measuring the quality of democracy, with the initial challenge consisting in the very definition of 'quality of democracy', there is a notable effort to avoid conceptual simplification, associated with the electoral aspect of democracy (Munck, 2016). At the same time, there is an effort to avoid the simplification of the use of Eurocentric definitions or inputs, i.e., to promote the inclusion of definitions or indicators that can reflect the political, cultural and social differences in the international community (Baker, 1999; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

It is in this web of models of organisation of society that there is a need to examine in depth the impact of populism on the quality of democracy, and there is a need to verify whether the emergence of populist parties is a central element in the greater instability of political regimes.

1. Populism and Authoritarianism in the southern hemisphere.

When we approach the set of classifications and rankings on the quality of democracy in the global context, we see a predominance of countries from the southern hemisphere in the classification of hybrid and authoritarian regimes. While it is true that we must consider the diversity existing at the level of the operationalisation of the concepts and the existing indicators to measure the quality of democracy, it is important to bear in mind the creation of conditions conducive to the affirmation of populist solutions or ideas.

Operationally, we can carry out the analysis of authoritarianism based on three dimensions/levels: ‘the structure of political systems, psychological dispositions about power and political ideologies’ (Bobbio, Matteucci and Pasquino, 1998: 94). Within this framework, there is a clear opposition between authoritarianism and democracy, a path that is difficult to reconcile, although it is more present in hybrid regimes and systems.

If we look at the literature on authoritarian regimes and fragile states, we can see some similarities. However, the context is crucial to distinguish systemic fragility, produced or caused by multiple political, economic and social factors, from authoritarianism underpinned by the exercise of political power. In this domain, Miranda Delgado (2020) presents an important distinction between authoritarianism and legalised authoritarianism – the latter would represent a mechanism for maintaining the established power under the guise of some level of plurality and democratic competition if the power of the President was not at stake.

Looking at the latest edition of the *Economic Intelligence Unit*³, only 43% of the countries analysed are considered democracies (flawless democracies and flawed democracies), with many states classified as hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes. The distribution of this classification is not proportional, with most countries classified as democracies being located on the European continent and in the Western world. In contrast, hybrid and authoritarian regimes are mostly located in the African continent. In the framework of the African continent, only seven countries considered to be democracies are present, namely: Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mauritius, Lesotho, South Africa and Namibia.

The need to take a more detailed look at the African continent stems from the existence of a gap in the development of comparative studies on how internal political-institutional dynamics constitute a key element for understanding the various waves of democratisation in the southern hemisphere and the resistance movements that ensure the continuation of authoritarian regimes in this part of the world.

Any historical-chronological approach to the emergence and evolution of populism focuses on the XX century and Latin American leadership. Still, there is a multiplication of studies dedicated to analysing populism in the framework of Western democracies, mainly due to the emergence of new populist political parties and leaders using populist ideas.

Addressing the African and South American context requires a long process of recourse to historical, social and cultural contributions, to understand the instituted power dy-

³ Information available at: www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/. Accessed on January 30, 2022.

namics, as well as the existence of institutional pillars distinct from those verified in the Western world. Resorting to the contribution of Resnick (2018), it is noted that the African context is fertile in the existence of profound social inequalities, which is one of the vectors that justify the emergence of populist movements, as well as anti-systemic political solutions. Naturally, how these parties/movements operate in fragile political systems results in greater weakness and challenges to the pillars of the system.

Within the framework of the existing literature, emphasis is placed on the contribution of Hess and Aidoo (2014) in the study of the causes of the growth of populism in Ghana and Zambia, due to strong Chinese investment in these countries. The political-electoral strategy of some political actors was outlined around the creation of a common enemy, identified as the external power. This approach focuses, essentially, on reviving nationalism and anti-imperialist struggles, with a focus on defending the autonomy and sovereignty of the State and creating a strong division in society (ideological, political and social polarization).

In a study involving the analysis of polls in 10 African countries, Eifert, Miguel and Posner (2010) found that ethnic identity continues to represent a central axis for understanding political dynamics in Africa and that these are more evident in periods of electoral competition, which justifies greater polarisation and political dispute based on broader and more diverse criteria than the different electoral policy proposals.

We, therefore, note the need to bear in mind not only the programmatic aspect but also the discursive aspect associated with the diversity existing in the context of the southern hemisphere, as well as the existing space for ethnic and social tensions to build a determinant framework for the registered electoral results.

This ethnic issue is highlighted by Cheeseman (2018), namely when presenting the impact of ethnicity on the division of groups and as a factor of exclusion. The question of identity and the reasons that lead individuals to group socially, in a process that takes into consideration the set of values and priorities that everyone stipulates, as well as the organisation of the society under study, are determining factors that often overlap with the deterministic dichotomy on which the central perspective of populism is based (people *versus* corrupt elite).

Given the historical background of the African continent, there is also a certain interconnection between the emergence of military leadership and the affirmation of populist movements, in a process of legitimising political power overlapping the role of political parties and civil society itself. The analysis of new political leaders has led to the creation of analytical frameworks that make it possible to verify the impact of the charisma of these new leaders, as well as the dynamics associated with the role of rhetoric in political competition (Bienen, 1985).

Alongside the African context, in Latin America, there is a strong presence of new forms of populism, as well as the existence of polarised political frameworks that ‘survive’ due to strong antagonisms in society. These processes are not exclusive to a particular region or exclusively affect certain political regimes but are rather a global phenomenon centred on a matrix based on political change through the fight against the current political situation.

However, although there are similar patterns in movements observed throughout the second half of the XX century and the first two decades of the XXI century, it is important to bear in mind that political regimes and societies, in general, are more or less prepared/vulnerable to face threats to their functioning according to a set of specific characteristics, both in the social, cultural, institutional, economic and political fields.

This concentration of authoritarian states or states with fragile political systems in the southern hemisphere can be understood as a failure of globalization, as well as attesting to the difficulty of transposing the democratic model predominant in the northern hemisphere to other realities (Kaplan, 2014).

Recurring to the contribution of Ihonvbere (2018), there are two trends at the level of the formulation/construction of the powers of a given community: a lesser relevance of the State in determining the living conditions of the populations and the substitution of elites and representatives of political power. We, therefore, witness the identification of a set of barriers to political regime change in specific contexts, even considering the strength and impact of globalization, as well as the influencing processes of international organisations (Ihonvbere, 2018).

When addressing the political instability of some political regimes, as well as the emergence of some political leaderships, it is possible to find similarities in the topics addressed, as well as in the communication strategy used. At this level, there is a reproduction or mimicking of the existing conditions for the emergence of populist solutions.

We can succinctly identify some common features for the affirmation of a populist agenda in the southern hemisphere, namely the maintenance of an anti-colonial (anti-imperialist) discourse, the defence of a process of autonomisation of these states in the framework of international relations, as well as their respective positioning in positions of political leadership in international organisations, the existence of strong economic and social disparities in society, the permanence of ethnic divisions, the increased use of alternative media, particularly in the Latin American context, the preponderance of charisma in the analysis of political leaderships and the challenge posed to the separation of powers in the existing institutional archetype.

The *Fragile State Index* and the *Economic Intelligence Unit Democracy Index* show a greater number of African states in the context of fragile or authoritarian regimes. In contrast, most South American States are situated on the level of flawed democracies, which may result from greater consolidation of democratic processes (longer-established democracies) and less ethnic division.

Conclusions

The approach to the phenomenon of populism has motivated the development of numerous studies on the political organisation of states, the way political power is exercised, the impact of the new political parties and movements on the quality of democracy and the relationship between elected representatives and voters, in a process in which the very definition of populism represents a challenge for academics. In the debate, we find two prevailing views: framing populism from the point of view of recourse to an emotional discourse, simple and focused on 'activating' people's instincts, and envisag-

ing populism through recourse to proposals to the liking of voters, fostering a division between ‘people’ and ‘elite’ (Mudde, 2004: 542).

However, when studying the evolution of populism there are multiple views, including a focus on trying to build an ideological basis for populism, as well as studying populism from the point of view of political practice and approaching the context to understand its roots and ramifications. In this diversity of analyses, there is a gradual approach between an initial positive framing of the concept and the negative perspective that we see today, as well as the existence of various factors that promote the emergence of populist political solutions, with the geographical, political, cultural, economic, social and ethnic context playing a relevant role in the interpretation of the phenomenon.

Populism objectively emerges from a set of tensions existing in society, the contestation of the established power and the defence of policies that aimed at mitigating the disparity between the groups that composed society. It is, imminently, a political and social movement, which encompasses the political framework of the left and the right and is present in both democratic and authoritarian regimes.

In other words, the attempt to ‘accommodate’ populism in a political spectrum or a particular form of organisation of political power does not correspond to the essence of the analysis that has been carried out, since populism coexists in democratic spaces and is exercised, in various contexts, within absolute respect for the democratic game. The literature identifies a series of factors that trigger the emergence of these phenomena, such as the social and economic crisis, ethnic and cultural differences, the phenomenon of globalisation, the power struggle, the dispute over natural resources, the snowball effect between movements in neighbouring countries, and the impact of new communication and electoral campaign techniques, centred on the ‘game of emotions.’

The impact of populism varies according to the stability of institutions and the democratic consolidation of the country. In countries with weakened regimes, movements tend to take advantage of the weaknesses of the country and the political structure to assert new ideas and projects for organising society. In this area, the ‘attraction’, in specific contexts, for populism based on authoritarianism and the development of revolutions or coups as a means of achieving power is highlighted. Since the establishment of democracy is not given on a global scale, it is important to bear in mind the specificities of authoritarian regimes and the political and social instability experienced in various countries to understand the dynamism of populism in countries on the African continent and Latin America.

The reality shows the existence of a polysemic concept, applicable to multiple realities and approached according to different contributions and scientific perspectives, making it difficult to create a consensus on the mechanisms and effects associated with the proliferation of populist ideas in the global context.

In this domain, there is a broader scope for the study of populism in the framework of fragile states and more unstable political regimes, where a transversal ideological matrix is used by various populist leaders but conditioned to the specific context of each country.

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