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Democracies, Autocracies or Partocracies? Reflections on What happened when Liberation Movements were transformed to Ruling Parties, and Pro-Democracy Movements Conquered Government.

As an introduction to this paper I would like to refer to a March 24, 2010 Human Rights Watch Report [1] on the situation in Ethiopia before the May 23 elections in the country. This reference is not intended only as a reflection on the situation in Ethiopia, but also as a way of exemplifying some tendencies that find parallels in other parts of Africa, and which often manifest themselves more clearly at times of elections, than at other times. One of the assertions in the report is that the ruling party and the state apparatus in Ethiopia are becoming increasingly integrated, and that the government makes use of this combined force to silence opposition and dissent. This takes place through the use of legal restrictions on the activities of NGOs and civil society organisations, confining the activities of the media. The government makes use local officials to influence the attitudes of the rural population by skewed distribution of favours and support as well as intimidation and witholding of services to those who do not support the ruling party. These are by the way very similar tactics to those employed by ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe in relation to elections, and other dominant governing parties also use them in order to secure the support of rural voters.

I use this example from Ethiopia to illustrate of how an upcoming election brings about some of the clearest manifestations of the changing balance between the elements of the political space in what has been described as dominant party systems in contemporary Africa. As I shall return to later, Ethiopia is an example of a political system that has grown out of what has been designated as second-generation African liberation movements. But this also implies that the Ethiopian experience shares some ideal typical characteristics with first-generation liberation movement political configurations.

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[1] See: http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/03/24/ethiopia-repression-rising-ahead-may-elections

What we are faced with are authoritarian systems where there is no dividing line between the ruling party, on the one hand, and the elements of the state – the executive, legislatures, and public institutions – on the other. The situation in Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF, Angola under MPLA, and Mozambique under FRELIMO, Uganda under NRM, and Ethiopia under Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) are typical examples. Political leaders assume that they embody the nation, or the people, rather than regarding themselves as representatives of the citizens.

> Of course there are many problems inherent in a party-state. The one is that if the party is paralysed by factional fights, tainted by corruption or run undemocratically, the country are also likely to be. Turning into party-states are one of the reasons why many African countries run by former independence or liberation movements have failed to institute broad-based democracy when they came to power. When the ruling independence or liberation movements became corrupt, undemocratic or divided into factions, or the leadership become personalised, their governments became so also, stunting a democratic, development and service delivery efforts. [2]

Political Power

Political power is dependent on the relationship between five elements that constitute a society's political space. It is important to bear in mind that these do not necessarily act in conjunction with each other. Often, the contradictions between these determine what type of state exists – be it democratic or autocratic or somewhere in-between. The first element is the so-called state-powers – that is, the government, the parliament and the courts of law. The second is the political parties. The third is the bureaucracy and the coercive forces of the state. The fourth is what is referred to as the civil element – that is to say, organisations and movements of all kinds that aim at having political influence upon the state. The fifth is the media in terms of their interaction with the state powers and civil society.

The issue at hand is thus of what constitute political processes as well the relationship between the elements of the state and other spaces for political activities. This involves topics that concern social mobilisation and the types of competitive politics that evolve both formally and informally. A focus of the latter concerns what constitutes civil society and the formal organisational structures (NGOs, CSOs) with which it is associated. However, one should not underestimate the informal social, economic and political activities and actions that express popular dissatisfaction and represent openings for potential change. These often

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[2] Gumede, William (2008) "Mbeki, Zuma: A Political Earthquake" PAMBAZUKA NEWS 401. Oct. 9. 2008. http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/51032 (accessed 15.10.2008)

go unreported in the press, as they do not relate directly to the daily agenda of official reporting. However, the interpretation of such developments and institutions is important. Although they are not treated as direct political phenomena, they may form part of the way that the media communicate and enunciate social experience through a variety of genres and forms, among others, in popular culture. Examples of these types of semi-political manifestations are riots that express popular dissatisfaction and which often are directed at weaker social elements. The xenophobic riots in South African townships are but one example. Another is the social unrest that took place in Maputo early 2007.

African Party Systems

African party systems have typically been described as having four forms: One-party systems, two-party systems, dominant-party systems, and multi-party systems. [3] Of these the first type is not really of any concern in this context. Though it should be mentioned that one of the states that is the result of a second-generation liberation struggle, namely Eritrea, is a classical example of a repressive one-party political system. Furthermore the other three types of party systems are also the result of the break up of previous one-party states. Thus the structures that grew out of the democratisation processes that started in the 1990s to quite some degree have their roots in one-party systems, and this has also come to influence their political composition.

I propose that the new 'democracies' that have developed exist in the span between two poles: One of these is a form of minimalist democracy. The other is what I would call semi-democratic autocracies. The first form implies a principle respect for the fundaments of a minimal form of democracy. That is they involve a public contestation for power in the form of regular elections. There is universal franchise and the electoral practice is more or less free from fraud and approved by international observers of many kinds and from many quarters. Freedom of association and expression is respected to quite some degree so that not only alternative political parties but also other societal groups, which constitute a civil society, can operate more or less freely. The media in these states are both independent and government controlled. Government dominates the national broadcasters. The independent

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[3] For a good overview of the characteristics of these systems see: M. A. Mohamed Salih and Per Nordlund International IDEA (2007) *Political Parties in Africa. Challenges for Sustained Multiparty Democracy.* Stockholm.

ones are often regional or communal. The most important are to be found in the capital and other big cities. They are weaker than the national broadcaster and in general struggle economically. In principal there is also a judiciary free from government control that is able to check abuses and the use of arbitrary power from whatever source. Thus what we are faced with in many ways is a procedural form of democracy. [4]

I call the other pole democratic autocracies; a clearly autocratic state is evident here. The rulers have no qualms about using coercive means or fraud to stay in power. Nevertheless, they legitimise their rule by maintaining some form of semblance of a democratic process – such as regular elections – albeit flawed. There is a certain degree of freedom of expression, but the media are controlled and restricted. The judiciary is either totally under government control or it has a semi-independent status. CSOs and NGOs are suffering from restrictions. The military and the police function as political and violent instruments of the government.

Ii is n relation to these two poles we can place the existing political systems in Africa.

Multi-party System Variations

The two-party system is duopolistic, which implies that there are two parties that have a dominant position, though there may be a number of other parties that also contest elections, but these have little influence or presence outside the election periods. In general the larger of the two parties is able to rule alone, and also holds the presidency. The other party constitutes a stronger or weaker opposition. In theory there is a chance of the opposition winning elections, but it is on rare occasions that it happens. An interesting aspect of the system is that it may develop into a dominant-party system, or that it also has elements of a multi-party system. Furthermore it may lead to a situation where the two parties enter into a coalition government. Let us now try to identify some countries that fit the description.

An example of a functioning two party system is the case of Ghana. After the experience with the second military dictatorship of Jerry Rawlings elections were held in

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[4] For a discussion of some early features of this "[…]realistic notion of what type of democracy might be evolving in Africa"[…], which "[…] has to be found much closer to the minimalist end of the spectrum than the more ambitious maximalist end." Clapham, Christopher & John Wiseman (1995) "Conclusion: assessing the prospects for the consolidation of democracy in Africa" in Wiseman, John (ed) (1995) *Democracy and Political Change in Sub-Saharan Africa*. London (Routledge) p. 220.

1992, which Rawlings won as the leader of National Democratic Congress (NDC). He and his party won again in the elections of 1996. However in 2000 the NDC candidate John Atta Mills lost to John Kufour of New Patriotic Party (NPP). The same result repeated itself in 2004. But then in 2008 John Atta Mills and NDC won over Nana Akufo-Addo from NPP. The result was decided on a very slim margin, approximately 40.000 votes. In the Parliament NDC has a slight majority of 116, while NPP holds 107 seats. Independents and two smaller parties have 7 seats between them, meaning that the government majority is two seats. It should be borne in mind, however, that the two dominant parties are the results of a number switches and conflicts and combinations of smaller parties.

While the results of the 2008 elections in Ghana have been lauded as an example of a successful transition of power, it should be pointed out that the political process of 2009 was marked by conflicts between the new government and the new opposition. The power change has resulted in tensions between the parties, as well as unrest within the two big parties. There exists entrenched factionalism within both parties, which can be linked more to personal than to political differences and conflicts. There also were examples of violent political clashes in 2009. Like in most African countries Ghana has all the characteristics of a presidential system. This can be interpreted as an inheritance from military rule and the Rawlings years. The executive branch is very dominant. The Constitution states that the president chooses the majority of his ministers from among the elected members of parliament, meaning the ruling party. There is a clear imbalance between the President's power and the Parliament's influence. The executive subverts the legislature. Another problem is that the judiciary also is weak in relation to the executive. Thus Ghana is an example of a functioning two-party system, but while it is a party system it is also clearly a presidential system. So far the results of all elections since 1992 have been that the President came from the majority parliamentary party, but this was close in 2008, and may contribute to instability.

Mozambique is an example of how a two-party system has developed into a dominant-party system. In the first elections in the country in 1994 the ruling party Frente de Libertação de Moçambique, (FRELIMO) and the opposition party Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, (RENAMO) both gained quite a number of votes and particularly in the Parliament the constituted blocks that were similar in size. FRELIMO had 129 seats and 44.33 percent of the votes. RENAMO had 112 seats and 37.78 percent of the votes. A smaller

party had 9 seats. In the presidential elections Joaquim Chissano got 53.30 percent of the votes, and Alfonso Dhlakama of RENAMO 33.73 percent. Meaning that Dhlakama received fewer votes than his party. In the subsequent elections – 1999, 2004, and 2009 – FRELIMO and its presidential candidates – Chissano and Armando Guebuza – increased their number of votes and seats in Parliament. The balance between the government and the opposition is now such that FRELIMO has a comfortable two-thirds majority of 191 seats, RENAMO has 51, and the smaller new opposition party MDM (Movimento Democrático de Moçambique) has 8. This clearly indicates that FRELIMO is becoming a very dominant party, and it is also an indication of this development that FRELIMO, which was the liberation movement turned political party that ruled during the period of the one-party state in the country, has maintained power ever since independence in 1975.

A third trajectory, which is often classified as a two-party system, may be exemplified by the developments in Kenya. However here there are also many smaller parties than the two main ones, which are organised behind the main presidential contenders. They play a role and enter into alliances (stable and unstable) in such a manner that it is difficult to characterise the system as having a clear two-party structure. Particularly the 2007 events with the ensuing widespread violence and the clear conflicts between the party of President Kibaki PNU (The Party of National Unity) [5] and the opposition led by Raila Odinga of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM)[6], showed the fragility of the system. The violence was among others the result of clear examples of election fraud and of other severe irregularities such as the hasty swearing in of Kibaki as President. After the violence and the political stalemate a "national accord" was signed in February 2008 between Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki. The agreement implied a power sharing where Kibaki remained President and Raila Odinga took up the newly created post of Prime Minister. The cabinet reflects the power sharing with an equal number of ministers between the two parties. The arrangement also includes Kalonzo Musyoka as Vice President. Since the accord was signed there have been constant conflicts between the two parties, and one may characterise the situation as a strange amalgam of a two-party, a multi-party, and a coalition system that is very unstable.

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[5] To illustrate the character of party politics in Kenya as consisting of alliances between parties it is sufficient to point out that PNU encompasses among others KANU, Narc-Kenya, Ford-Kenya, Ford-People, Democratic Party, Shirikisho, National Alliance Party of Kenya.

[6] ODM has split in two. The main group is headed by Raila Odinga. The other the Orange Democratic Movement–Kenya (known as ODM–Kenya) by Kalonzo Musyoka

As the accord also is a carefully balanced ethnic coalition it points in the direction of how party politics may include strong ethnic elements.

A fourth political course of a two-party system may be illustrated through the Zimbabwe experience. The current unstable and conflict ridden coalition government is in reality a three-party arrangement between ZANU-PF and MDC (T) and MDC (M). It is the result of two contradictory processes – pressure and resistance form below and widespread and violent refusal to accept to political change from the ruling ZANU-PF party. In reality the system has many characteristics of the dominant-party system and of the inheritance patterns that have marked the way that first-generation liberation movements have kept a hold on power. It is also typical that Zimbabwe has enormous power vested in the Presidency.

The multi-party systems have clear parallels to what has been designated as two-party systems, which often comprise more than two parties and coalitions between parties. The situations in both Zambia and Malawi, which often are characterised as having a multi-party system, may serve as examples. Despite the weakness of political parties and the party system in Zambia, Malawi, the possibilities of alteration in power are apparent. In Zambia the ruling party maintains power with a small parliamentary majority. In Malawi the incumbent President, Bingu wa Mutharika, won the elections in May 2009 with a clear majority. However, the good performance of the opposition is often neither a result of a functioning multi-party democracy nor of democratic consolidation, rather it is due to the erosion of the legitimacy of the ruling party. This was the case with the triumph of pro-democracy movements in the 1990s. And it is probably also the case with the disillusion with the political processes and elections that now results in decreasing voter participation.

In Zambia, the ruling MMD (Movement for Multiparty democracy) has serious democratic deficits. Its competitors, however, are not so different. The major parties in Zambia are poorly institutionalised, lack internal democracy, intolerant of dissent and exclusive in terms of their manner of organisation, they are also highly dependent on personalities as opposed to coherent policy platforms. For example, the major opposition party, the Patriotic Front (PF), which was runner-up in the 2006 general elections and the 2008 presidential by-election, has not held party elections for its national office-bearers since its inception in 2001. It has also expelled 16 of its Members of Parliament for disagreeing with the party leader.

The lack of representation of core constituencies is a serious element in the multi-party systems. Instead of representing the national interest, parties have tended to develop along lines of representing ethnic, regional and sectional support. In this perspective, it is particularly serious that ethnicity has become a weapon of choice for politics and violence — as the situation in Kenya illustrates.

The Dominant-Party System

The other major African political system growing out of the democratisation process that started in the early 1990s has been characterised as a dominant-party system. It is also at times called a hegemonic multi-party system. This means that there are regular competitive elections, but the ruling party dominates, and the opposition parties tend to be weakened in consecutive elections. Consequently the ruling parties frequently behave with a degree of self-sufficiency and arrogance that further secure their power. The result is often that voters react with apathy and abstentions. Habitually the parties use their power over electoral commissions to limit the electoral playing field before the elections and to commit fraud during the elections and in relation to the counting of the votes. Thus elections in such systems tend to function as an instrument for continued semi-authoritarian rule.

Hegemonic or dominant party systems run only very slight risks in the electoral arena, while competitive democracies are exposed to the risk of losing power. The probability of electoral surprises is minimal. The ruling parties in such systems are less likely to face splits within the ruling elites and breakaways from the party. Consequently hegemonic rule creates stability, and it is also an explanation for why the dominant parties strive to extend their control, and also why ruling parties in less stable and more competitive systems tend to wish for a more autocratic system. [7]

There may be an inherent contradiction here. On the one hand continuity is an aim to strive for, on the other hand it is important that the government appears as able to react to changes and renovate its policies. The dilemma is how to both maintain and preferably increase the power of the ruling party at the same time as it is presented as a party of change. A good example of this dilemma is that the slogan of FRELIMO in the 2004 elections in

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[7] See Schedler, Andres (2009), "The Contingent Power of Authoritarian Elections", in Lindberg, Staffan I. (2009) *Democratization by Elections. A New Mode of Transition*. Baltimore (The Johns Hopkins Press). p. 300

Mozambique was "FRELIMO – a força da mudança." It is a bit contradictory for a party that has been in power for 30 years to sell itself as force of change.

When it comes to the relationship between the executive and the parliament, dominant systems tend to have strong presidencies and also with their large majorities in parliaments full control of the legislative. This skews the ideal of some sort of balance between the executive and the legislative. The parliament often only functions as a nothing but a tool for promoting the interests of the government. This aspect is related to two phenomena that are quite evident in African politics. The first is that the parliamentary majorities in dominant systems are overwhelming; often they exceed a two-thirds majority. The other is that in presidential regimes the election of the executive gains much more attention than parliamentary campaigns resulting in that national assembly elections only become an appendage to the election and rule of the president.

The large majorities mean that the ruling parties need no longer be accountable to parliament. Dominant party systems thus may spell the demise of legislatures' control of the government. This is particularly serious in relation to the ability to scrutinise public expenditure and government spending. It thus opens up for gross abuse of funds and corruption. A good example of this is that there are no audits for the oil income that the Angolan government controls. And that government ministers usually do not need to declare their interests in businesses. Thus dominant party systems serve as an incentive to the development of nomenclaturas.

One of the most critical elements in relation to the possibility of scrutinising government, particularly when parliament is weakened, is the law-courts. The judiciary has the role not only of constraining the powers of the government, but also to secure the rule of law for the citizens. Consequently it should be independent, adhere to constitutional principles and be protected from interference. There are several examples of how dominant party systems have intervened in and put pressure on the judiciary, particularly in systems where the judges are presidential appointments. One of the most manifest examples of this is the way that ZANU-PF government changed the composition of the Zimbabwean judiciary in the years after 2000.

In relation to the bureaucracy and the police and the military the situation in the dominant-party systems is that these institutions are very much controlled by and integrated in the party-state configuration. Examples of this are the way that civil servants and

government employees campaign on the behalf of the ruling party during election campaigns. It is becoming increasingly impossible to make a career in state institutions unless you have a party card. One of the demands of the donors in their conflict with the Mozambican government at the beginning of 2010 after the elections was that FRELIMO party cells in government should be banned. The government refused to concede. There are many examples of such practices in the countries that confirm to the description of being dominant-party systems. An interesting example is how ZANU-PF loyal civil servants sabotage the decisions of the MDC ministers in the Zimbabwean Government of National Unity. Even more serious is that often the police and the military is being used to suppress dissent and opposition. The most obvious example has been Zimbabwe.

Now it is important to bear in mind that in dominant party-systems there may to quite some degree respect basic civil rights such as freedom of expression, organisation and assembly. On the other hand there also exist press laws that may severely restrict free and critical media. Nevertheless often the civil element and the media are weak in relation to a hegemonic state-party system that displays arrogance of power and are irresponsive to public demands for accountability. The question of accountability is essential for truly democratic systems. In systems with dominant parties the difficulties in holding the government accountable may be said to stem from what open sources are available. Often the government is reluctant to open up for scrutiny and resists all attempts to create transparency. Another demand of the donors in Mozambique in 2010 was that high officials should declare their assets. The government refused to concede. This only serves to illustrate that it is often very difficult to obtain information on what goes on behind the closed doors of the politics of government, party and business configurations.

Secondly it is difficult for civil society organisations to demand accountability from an all-powerful state. It is unlikely that governments are willing to be accountable unless they face pressure from sufficiently strong actors outside the state. This is again related to the possibilities that the media have for exposing malpractices. To be able to do so the media need to be both independent and have adequate sources and possibilities of conducting

investigations into official conduct. In such a situation the existence of freedom of access to information legislation is essential. [8]

The collapsing of the divisions between the ruling party and the state and the more or less complete dominance of the party of over all the five elements of the political system point in the direction of a configuration that may be called a 'partocracy'. This implies party government carried out not for the people but for the party. It has as a result the party politicisation of state institutions, and/or party penetration of civil society by client-patron networks and a failure of real representation.

According to the classification made by International Idea [9] in 2007 there are sixteen countries in Africa that can be classified as dominant-party systems. These are: Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia. It is striking that of these sixteen eight are the result of either the struggles of first- or second-generation liberation movements.

The Background to the New Systems

In an article in *New Statesman* in April 2007 on the situation in Zimbabwe William Gumede refers to Albert Memmi's book on *The Coloniser and the Colonised* and observes that Memmi among others treated "[…] the tendency of liberation movements, once in power to mimic the brutality and callousness of former rulers." And he asks: "Is there something inherent in the political culture of liberation movements that makes it difficult for them to sustain democratic platforms." [10] The liberation movements and the early leaders of independent Africa to a very large degree failed to implement the democratic aspirations that were such an important element of the anti-colonial struggle. The post-colonial regimes centred more on attaining independence from the colonial masters, and less on creating a democratic state and society. Thus arose authoritarian systems. [11]

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[8] For the arguments above see: Baker, Bruce (2002) "The Unaccountable State", in Zack-Williams, Tunde, Diane Frost & Alex Thomson (eds) (2002) *Africa in Crisis. New Challenges and Possibilities.* London. (Pluto Press)

[9] International Idea op.cit. referring to M.A.Mohamed Salih (ed) (2003) *African Political Parties: Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance*. London. (Pluto Press)

[10] Gumede, William (2007) "Africa. How we killed our dreams of freedom", *New Statesman*, 2 April 2007.

[11] See also Gumede, William (2009) "Building a democratic political culture" in Gumede, William & Leslie Dikeni (eds) (2009) *South African Democracy and the Retreat of Intellectuals.*Auckland Park (Jacana)

The first generation armed liberation movements that grasped power at independence have stayed in government without interruption since then, often with same leader as the head of state, also when they have been transformed into formal multi-party systems. These systems are more or less authoritarian and more or less corrupt, but they are invariably characterised by that it is not really possible for the opposition to gain power or win elections. There are many examples of these types of states ranging from the authoritarian ones where the same leader has been in power for decades since independence such as in Angola and Zimbabwe to states where the liberation movement turned party has governed continuously but under different presidents – Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa. An interesting aspect of the situation in Mozambique and Angola is that the two main opposition parties RENAMO (17.68 percent in the 2009 elections) and UNITA (10.39 percent in the 2008 elections) are former armed movements who fought the ruling parties in brutal civil wars. Both these parties have maintained autocratic party structures after their move from guerrilla armies to political parties.

The type of regimes resulted from what has been called "second liberation movements", and which "[…] waged a liberation struggle against the authoritarian rule that characterized some independent African states". [12] After their victory they ended up as ruling parties very similar to the first type of post-liberation regimes. This is the case for Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda among others.

As shown above the liberation movement systems can hardly be said to be democratic. Eritrea is a single-party dictatorship. Zimbabwe is in a political impasse where a coalition government consisting of an authoritarian liberation movement party does what it can to derail a democratic process. Angola is a strong presidential 'partocracy' run by a corrupt and subservient party elite. All these three systems

> […] exhibit the democratic deficit and anomalies peculiar to liberation struggles that resulted in the emergence of authoritarian states. In these countries, instead of democracy and the rule of law, the regimes are characterised by abuse of the civil, political, and human rights of the citizens. [13]

Ethiopia, Uganda, and Rwanda may probably be said to be more democratic than Angola, Eritrea, and Zimbabwe. But presidential and the party dominance is very strong.

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[12] This is term used by Salih, M.A. Mohamed (2007) in "African Liberation Movements, Governments and Democracy" *Democratization* Vol. 14. Issue 4. August 2007.
[13] ibid.

Mozambique shows clearer and clearer tendencies to develop in the direction of a true 'partocracy'.

Namibia and particularly South Africa show democratic credentials, though the recent elections in Namibia are worrisome.

> […] in common with the other liberation movements, they have maintained the twin elements of presidential and executive dominance - which could also be explained by reference to the history of liberation movements and their inclination towards concentrating political power. [14]

Maybe one of the most troubling aspects of the post-liberation movement regimes is the role of the powerful leaders such as Dos Santos, Afwerki, Mugabe, Zenawi, Museweni "[…] who expect unconditional loyalty and are too willing to use non-democratic means to silence their vocal opponents." [15]

Some of the countries that must be classified as dominant-party systems have made a transition from one-party systems to hegemonic multi-party systems, not all of these grew out of armed liberation movements. One example is Tanzania where Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) has stayed in power and with a very large majority since the introduction of multi-party elections in 1992. In the elections in 2005 the President won by gaining 80.28 percent of the votes, and the party got 206 of the 232 parliamentary seats filled through elections. There is no reason to believe that the elections at the end of 2010 will have any other result. But there are also other trajectories leading to a dominant party system. One example is Botswana, which has had regular multi-party elections since independence 1996. The country regularly scores high on democracy indexes. Nevertheless Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has always been in power, and there is little chance that the opposition will win an election. In 2009 BDP won 45 out of the 59 seats in The National Assembly. However it only received 53.26 percent of the votes.

Many of the democratic or pseudo-democratic systems in contemporary Africa are the result of popular movements that forced change on previous single-party states or military regimes. But in many of the countries that have had elections the legacy of the one-party state and the strong ruler is still present. Much of Francophone Africa has adopted the French political system with a strong presidency and a national assembly elected according to proportional representation. In other parts of Africa the role of the strong president has continued after the fall of the single-party state meaning that the executive remains the most

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[14] ibid
[15] ibid

important political element. The other state elements the legislature, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the coercive apparatus are to larger or more limited degree controlled by the President. This is one of the reasons why the coalition governments in Kenya and Zimbabwe are so fragile. The prime ministers – Odinga and Tsvangirai are clearly subservient both in structure and in political power to Kibaki and Mugabe.

> Compared to incumbent elites in other political regimes, Africa's political big men are relatively unencumbered by legal restrictions on the scope of their decision making. The state and civil institutions that check personal power in more institutionalized systems are typically too weak to play such a role in Africa. Personal rulers are accustomed to making executive and policy choices, if not at will, at least with a considerable degree of arbitrary discretion, limited only by the low administrative and extractive capacity of the state. To the extent that regime transitions become struggles over the rules of the political game, they hinge on opposition challenges to this arbitrary monopoly of powers arrogated by the president and ruling party.[16]

The parties in African multi-party structures are often based on personalities and ethnic or rather regional allegiances rather than clear political and ideological differences. It is also typical of the system that the parties regularly show their strength only at elections, but are weak in the period between elections. They often also lack in internal party democracy and organisational strengths, structures and capacities. The membership basis is also often weak. Thus also in multi-party systems it is the aim to gain political influence through gaining seats in Parliament, but more than anything to capture executive power. Opposition parties are faced with structural limitations, and thus in multi-party systems the converging of opposition and ruling parties often occur. It also seems that opposition parties belong to the least trusted institutions in Africa. [17]

If successful, political parties may provide their leaders and supporters with social and economic benefits. Thus, in most African countries, political parties serve as institutions that may provide the basis for power and influence and consequently access to economic benefits. The parties often rise and fall with their political leaders, and for the members to attract the goodwill of the leader may lead to social and economic mobility. This is often linked to the so-called 'big man syndrome'. Particularly for the party leadership politics is a way of enhancing social standing both at the constituency level and nationally. It contributes to acquiring wealth, prestige and a measure of power. This is for their own benefit as well as for

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[16] Bratton, Michael & Nicolas van de Walle (1997) *Democratic Experiments in Africa*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) p. 270.

[17] See among others: Randall, Vicky (2007) "Political Parties in Africa and the Representation of Social Groups", in Basedau, Matthias, Gero Erdmann & Andreas Mehler (eds) (2007) *Votes, Money and Violence. Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Uppsala. (NAI)

the benefits of their supporters. To be an MP is thus something that secures benefits, and it is better to be in government than in opposition.

To conclude multi-party systems may be more democratic from a principled point of view in that they are more pluralistic than other system, but the question is whether they are more stable. Maybe the most stable political arrangement is to be found in those states that have what have been called a dominant-party system.

Possible Areas for further Research

Political spaces encompass four areas of contestation. The first regards the twin relationship of representation and accountability between the citizenry and political leaders. This is an issue that lies at the core of democratic forms of governance. Do the perceived links between political parties and civil society really exist in Sub-Saharan Africa? Alternatively, does civil society explicitly disassociate itself from political parties? How does the institutionalisation of electoral practices, representative institutions and the relationship between the governing party and the state manifest itself? How can the relationship between political parties and civil society be characterised?

The second area regards the legal circumscription of the political sphere through constitutions, courts and various institutions of constraint.

The third area relates to the formation and exchange of ideas, information and opinions, which are the foundation for political practices in general and political opposition and exercise of societal accountability in particular. In terms of the development of the democratic public sphere, the securing of political space and media freedoms are central. What role do the media play in the continuous political processes and in the opening up of arenas for alternative viewpoints and development trajectories? How is this reflected: both in traditional and new and alternative media? Furthermore, what exactly is their role as democratic arenas? How do they provide a public sphere for the formation of political identity and opinion that could contribute to the changing of the political landscape?

A fourth consideration relates to the role of the international society. Most African countries are aid-dependent and therefore are particularly 'vulnerable' to international influences: financial as well as normative. What role do global pressures and national responses play in the democratisation struggles? How has the interaction with

international aid agencies – and also with other global norms and institutions – influenced the institutionalisation of African political and media systems?