



Party, Party Systems and Democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Presented at the

**Sixth Global Forum on Reinventing Government
Seoul, Republic of Korea
24-27 May 2005**

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No democracy no party, no parties no democracy

Modern democracies are legitimised by enlarged participation and government accountability thus they are by definition party democracies. Parties are the essential link between society and public office as they are the representative agencies oriented to giving voice to their particular constituencies, present candidates at elections and through competitive elections place candidates for public office (Sartori, 1976; Kopecky and Mair, 2002: pp.275).¹

Soon after independence in almost all sub Saharan Africa nation-States the main justification for the adoption of single party "democracies" derived from a conception of the society as one single constituency, united by the common history of oppression. In the first phase typically the adoption of Single parties and Presidential Constitutions, giving absolute primacy to the executive power, considered these two institutions essential both for performing the functions of representation and mobilisation and as the pillars of institutional stability and problem solving towards the co-ordination of development strategies, which were meant to be equitable, distributive and for the advantage of all the population. Conceived as "mass" parties in power, the single parties rapidly turned into "societies that made themselves into states" and into Party-states. Apart from all other considerations, essentially the general loss of legitimacy of single parties in Africa was due to their inadequacy to perform the tasks of political integration and harmonisation of the plurality of interests and institutions in each country.

Democratisation, or the "third wave of democracy", has put at the centre of the transition multiparty political systems, competitive elections, constitutional and institutional reforms. Parties are classically conceived as institutions of mobilisation of support and of political integration of an enlarged participation, with the task to legitimise, rationalise and give order to the plurality of interests expressed in ethnic, local, class, regional priorities, as well as institutions that discipline the political behaviour of their constituencies.² In societies long deprived of politics the danger was to fall back into populism, or to informal or disorderly opting out from the state expressed in ethnic, or religious types of fundamentalism and of conflictuality.³

¹ G. Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: a Framework of Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976; P. Kopecky, P. Mair, *Political Parties and Government*, in M.A. M. Salih (ed), *African Political Parties. Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance*, Pluto Press, London 2002, pp.275-292

² S. Bartolini, *Political parties rise, consolidation and decline(?) in Europe. A developmental perspective*, paper presented at the conference on " New challenges for Political Parties and Representation", The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, May 6-7, 2005

³ "populism has generally flourished in the absence of democracy" (G. Pasquino, *Populism and Democracy*, Italian Studies Seminar Series, The Robert and Maria Evans Inaugural Lecture in Italian Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, The Bologna Center, n.3 April 2005, p.9), while opting out from politics and the state into exclusive identities may end up in anarchy and conflicts proliferation and segmentation in a deadly combination of grievances (by excluded populations) and greed (by warlords and criminal entrepreneurs) see the cases of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kivu (Democratic Republic of Congo). See also C.Cramer, *Civil War is not a Stupid Thing: Exploring the Interlinkages between growth, inequality and conflict*, in Working Paper no.73, Soas, Department of Economics 1998 : " what

Economic liberalisation in the '80s and political democratisation in the '90 through trade led growth promised what state strategies had failed to deliver, a developmental take off which would eventually trickle down to the less privileged sectors of the populations. The new "revolution of rising expectation" was charged with the magic of "market" and "democracy", considered as healthy competition for growth and enlarged participation for fair political representation through a competitive party system.

The opening to a multiparty system was resisted as long as possible by many leaders, who used all the means to their disposal to curtail the process, to condition the outcomes and in some cases to brutally interrupt its course. Nevertheless, on the whole the mobilisation of political protest against incumbent governments and the quest for democracy were difficult to repress because single parties or non party military regimes internal legitimacy had worn out and thanks also to a decisive international attention to human rights.

Pessimist academics and many observers assumed that democratisation and party competition would increase pressures on government decision making with limited autonomous capability to face strong distributive pressures. From a different perspective, those who saw the failure of previous democratic dispensation in the denial of recognition of the diversity and the hierarchy of the multiplicity of identities and forms of subordination saw a fundamental flaw in multiparty systems structured to be functional to an external political economy agenda.

Democracy requires democrats and democratic participation and procedures, and therefore the research in each case should start from taking into account which are the specific conditions permitting or obstructing the consolidation of parties and of a viable competitive party systems. Under which condition parties are able to perform as key actors in the new democratic dispensation? To what degree is party competition institutionalised and concretely permitted? Are dominant or hegemonic party systems able or willing to enlarge real participation that is perform the role both of mobilisation and education to democratic values and practices? What is the space left to the emergence and the fair competition between a plurality of parties and how? The paper will only give a general overview of problems encountered in democratic party systems consolidation in sub Saharan Africa, in order to contribute to open the discussion as to advance in research.

African parties have a history

Parties in sub-Saharan Africa are the oldest political institutions, they represent the "time when politics came", the key instruments for the conquest of the "political kingdom".⁴ They have their roots and have developed in opposition to colonial rule, negotiating or fighting for independence. Differences in such a vast sub continent divided in so many Nation-States are notable; nevertheless ideological, revolutionary and machine nationalist parties developed co-ordinating various and sometimes very divergent types of social groups and associations. Their leadership was represented by a variable mixture of new and old elites with different local and regional roots and ethnic identity, as it is testified by the common use of names bearing the identification of Congress, Convention, and National Council. The party organisations who won the mantle of liberators of their respective countries did not privilege the identification with a "part" of the constituency, but had the ambition to become the seat of the incarnation of the general will of the whole oppressed population.

With independence the dominance of "mass" nationalist parties, whether ideological or political machines, organising clusters of interests from the centre to the local levels turned rapidly to single party rule. De jure or de facto, they were proclaimed as the only legitimised representative institutions, derived from the struggle, able to dismantle the inheritance of colonial divide and rule institutions and policies. Single parties asserted to be the only capable instance to articulate and aggregate citizens' interests and demands towards what were the new independent Nation-State priorities, national integration and development. Political plurality and ethnic diversity, as manipulated by colonial rule, were denounced as obstacles to nation building and national unity. The single party was on the whole accepted and justified as the best solution by the international community and by academia, since the priority was the political order against the risk of disorderly mobilisation of grievances (Huntington, 1970, Zolberg, 1966).⁵ Central to the single party ideology was the idea that liberation was only the first step towards the construction of a more equitable and distributive nation-state in conditions of high asymmetry in the access to resources dividing regions, ethnic and social groups.

As a matter of fact the integration of single parties with the state produced a centralised, vertical type of rule. However different and broadly divided between those where ethnic and tribal constituencies and interests was the terrain for the organisation of consensus and those in which the tentative was either to abolish, or to forbid any customary public roles, if only cultural or ceremonial ones, single-party

⁴ The famous Kwame Nkrumah sentence stressed the primacy of party politics essential role in the independence of Ghana and Africa as a whole. C. Lenz, "The Time when Politics Came": Ghana's Decolonisation from the Perspective of a Rural Periphery, in "Journal of Contemporary African Studies" 20,2,2002 tells us how the population of the Northern territories of Ghana identified the arrival of politics with parties penetration (CPP and NPP) at the time of the transition to the elections of 1956 and the proclamation of the Republic of Ghana in 1960.

⁵ S. P. Huntington, *Social and Political Dynamic of One-party Systems*, in S.P. Huntington, C.H. Moore (eds), *Authoritarian Politicism in Modern Society. The Dynamics of One-Party Systems*, Basic Books, New York 1970; A. Zolberg, *Creating Political Order. The Party States of West Africa*, Rand-McNally, Chicago 1966

did not promote democratic regimes. Democracy remained an unfulfilled promise, because the mode of power remained basically authoritarian and functioned on the basis of a hierarchy of networks and alliances with local tribal, ethnic constituencies, or through top-down absolute sovereignty of institutions which helped to suffocate precisely the grassroots politicisation of society which had been the backbone of the process of national liberation.

Effective accountability and representation through popular democratic participation gave way to personal rule and eventually to single party dictatorships on the one hand, and to reliance on bureaucratic controls that fell victim to corruption, itself not unrelated to single party domination.

After independence parties which derived from the conquest of power by liberation movements substituted self-empowerment through mobilisation with bureaucratised and dogmatic cadres closing all spaces for grassroots mobilisation and effective participation.

Structural deficiencies of the nation-states and the weight of negative inheritances, made worse by an hostile international environment, as the cold war made of Africa one of its main field of hot confrontation, have been underlined as causes of single party states "failure". From the second decade of independence it was clear that dissent and governments' falling legitimacy were not only described by military *coups d'état*, but also by various forms of social and political struggles that could not be understood only in term of grievances rooted in the colonial past or in the manoeuvres of neo-colonialism and could not be contained by repression.

By the end of that decade most of the African countries strangled by various political, economic and environmental crisis had no other option that to negotiate, from a position of weakness, stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes inspired by the primacy of market over state led growth.

The 1980's opened the age of structural adjustment while the 90s represented the decade of the "return to democracy". The stabilisation and structural adjustment reforms, inspired by the conviction that the root problem of African economies was excessive intervention of the state, introduced, starting at the beginning of the '80s, measures of import liberalisation, privatisation, budget stabilisation and financial regulations, all prerequisites to increase trade and capital flows. After a decade of structural adjustment it became evident that market liberalisation was too slow and inefficient. With the end of the Cold war at the beginning of the '90s economic liberalisation was to be supported and reshaped by democratisation processes and the promotion of institution building, "good governance" and rules and norms and capacity building.

While the first wave of modernisation theorists had supported the state as a pedagogue in charge of guided development, now the state had to become the regulator, providing the playing field and the basic rules for private enterprise growth and development. In the political realm the twin solution was the promotion of democracy intended as pluralism through multiparty elections, institution building, the adoption of the rule of law, the promotion of civil society.

Democratisation at the beginning of the '90's was resisted in most countries by Single-party leaders, but hailed by the majority of the populations in another wave of "revolution of rising expectations". Between 1990 and 1994 the first multiparty elections took place in 29 countries. Between 1985 and 1989 only nine countries had had multiparty suffrages, but between 1990 and 1998 seventy were the legislative and sixty the presidential elections in 42 countries. Between 1998 and 2001 there were 55 elections and 8 referenda. Everywhere electoral laws, the redrawing of constitutions, and elections became a terrain of confrontation.

The time when politics returned

Parties have a history but they also are the product of institutional development and are reflect social inputs.⁶

It is important to underline the social conditions in which the transition to democracy takes place, beginning with the decade of the 90s. Relevant in all countries are the internal changes caused by demographic growth, the accelerated urbanisation the migration of population across regions and national borders, the growing vocal demand for education, health services and jobs and, last but not least, more equity in access to full citizenship by marginalised individuals, rural communities, by young people and women.

This happened in a situation of austerity and "structural adjustment" which requested a withdrawal of governments from key developmental functions and a further retrenchment of the already weak welfare protections. One of the consequences is the evidence of a rapidly growing inequality in access, in many instances radicalising competition on land and other resources and giving further fuel to the divisiveness of parochial identities. Democratisation, the return of "politics", brought on the limelight the asymmetries in each nation-State, the demands and grievances of ethnic groups, rural and urban communities or collectivities, as well as individuals, youth and women suffering social political and economic alienation and marginalisation.

⁶ M. Bratton, N. Van De Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa. Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997; L. Diamond, *Developing Democracy. Towards Consolidation*, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore 1999. See the recently published institutional analysis comparing democratisation in Benin and Niger showing the interaction between inherited structural problems, institutional formulas and political strategies: M. Gazibo, *Les paradoxes de la démocratisation en Afrique, Analyse institutionnelle et strategique*, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Montreal 2005

The majority of African citizens possess scarce and inadequate assets such as education, training, access to capital, to be able to compete. Large sectors of the population of each country, because of historical and social marginalisation do not have any social and cultural resource that can give them "voice" inside the modern party organisation of politics. Formerly excluded regions, minorities and in particular rural sectors of the population being the most fragile and exposed to vulnerability, have less or no possibility to organise or to become listened members of parties since they do not have access to state resources and have generally very narrow political margins to operate (lack of means, of information, illiteracy, disease, poverty).⁷

Dominant and hegemonic party systems

In situations of retarded institutional development,⁸ that is mainly in the absence of institutions legitimated to perform integrative tasks, and the weak organisation of interest groups and civil society, multipartitism resulted in party systems characterised by the "politicisation" of ethnic, religious, regional local cleavages, as they had been shaped by inclusion and, or exclusion during the era of "party-state" and military regimes. Some of the parties were created to defend relatively privileged positions and assets, others were expression of grievances from marginalised groups, and some were organised as leaders' enterprises instrumental to get a share of state power.

In general parties which had detained state power for long periods without military interventions were able to transform or reformulate party strategies to maintain power under the new democratic dispensation. The parties which have won the majority of seats in successive elections, being thus a constant component of the executives, are those who have been able to maintain the organisation and the financial means as to be able to restructure their political base and alliances and to co-ordinate vertical and horizontal political division. This through a system of privileged access to resources and incentives, provided both by their previous monopoly of power and often by external support. Alternance to power in first democratic elections took place only in a few cases and it has been sustainable, that is not being interrupted by *coups d'Etat*, only in some cases of which the more relevant are those of Benin, Zambia, Madagascar and Mali and later Senegal, Ghana and Kenya. In all cases the political scenario has been far from harmonious, parties and coalitions in power as well as

⁷ Drawing the connection among civil, social and political rights O'Donnel underlines how most theories of democracy ignore issues such as extreme poverty, illiteracy, disease, malnutrition and constant fear of violence as inhibitors of that individual "agency" that is minimally reasonable capabilities and options. The perspective adopted here leads to a crucial question that is to what extent and under what conditions poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups may use the available political rights as a platform of protection and empowerment for struggles towards the extension of their civil and social rights. G. O'Donnel, *Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics*, Ids Working Paper 118, June 2000

⁸ P. Anyang'Nyong'o, *Institutionalisation of Democratic Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa*, (ECDPM Working paper n.36), Maastricht:ECDPM, 1997

opposition parties have not been able to co-ordinate or to build durable sustainable alliances.

The disparity in access to political resources and material incentives, to distribute to each component of the coalition and to its individual members, between parties in power and in opposition seems to be the main obstacle to the consolidation of parties and of party systems. Besides being fragmented oppositions lack material incentives to build sustainable coalitions as well as ideological harmonisation. Coalitions are generally constructed ad hoc, to win elections but even then continue to be riddled by divisions.

Data show how most of the "multiparty" systems can be classified as "dominant" party systems, in which the opposition either is too fragmented, or incapable to build larger coalitions in order to become a force in parliament or to win elections. Some party systems can be described as hegemonic party systems.⁹

The difference between the two cases is subtle and always depends from the political process. One example is Kenya in which Kanu was the dominant party in the system and although opposition parties were free to organise and recruit their members and were allowed some recognised impact on the legislature, alternance looked for a long time through two elections highly problematic, given the ability of Moi to control and direct ethnic consensus and conflict. In dominant party systems alternance is possible while in the hegemonic systems parties are permitted to exist but under very strict surveillance and they are hardly competitors on equal basis, therefore alternance to power is highly unlikely if not impossible without a change of regime.

Burkina Faso illustrate the case of an hegemonic force defined by: "the symbiotic relationship that exist between the party in power and the state in which the majority (dominant) party appears to dominate all position of power, as well as the state administration".¹⁰ Dominant and hegemonic party systems have been supported by constitutional reforms which have left intact presidential systems leaving most of the power to the executive.

In Kenya up to the 2002 elections, that saw the victory of an alliance between opposition parties and very active civil society organisations, alternance to power had been previously ostracised through "the steady accumulation of political power in the office of the executive presidency"¹¹ and by "intensified, overt and politically inspired inter-ethnic competition". A Kenyan scholar analysing "the hostile nature of

⁹ The datas presented by M. Bratton, N. Van De Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa. Regime Transition in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997, p.262 following the first and second multiparty elections show the average share of legislative seats going to the winning party which was on the increase (from 61.1% to 69.7%) and it is increasing in third elections too.

¹⁰ International Idea, democracy in Burkina Faso, Capacity Building Series 5, 1998

¹¹ International Idea, *The state of Democracy. Democracy Assessments in Eight Nations around the World*, Kluwer Law International , The Hague 2002, p. 43

the political environment"¹² (Wanjohi, 2003:249) has analysed the "sustainability" of political parties underlining the weakness of "mission, vision and ideological base", the partiality of state machinery, the temptation to resort to manipulations of the constitutional, legal and administrative framework of the "party in central office"¹³ to stay in power. While citizenship in Kenya is inclusive and formally equal for all the country's minorities, many groups feel vulnerable, some for political reasons as they did not belong to the single then dominant party (KANU) which ruled for nearly 40 years. Since democratisation opposition parties suffered and survived "continuous official harassment, but were able to maintain a substantial opposition in parliament". The opposition parties from a position of weakness and scarce institutionalisation have been able to overcome their deficiencies and build a coalition (NARC) which won the elections of the 27th of December 2002, ousting Kanu from power for the first time since independence. Nevertheless the stability of the new government continues to be marred by intense infighting in the winning coalition. The president's project to create a single unified party is strongly opposed by relevant leaders of the government coalition and the drafting of the constitutional reform is a focus of political rivalries and factionalism thus rendering problematic the "sustainability" of the party system even in an "exemplar" case of alternance to power.

Single parties were mainly "ideological" parties while dominant and hegemonic parties, which have survived the political and institutional transition maintaining power, can be defined as "pragmatic". Ideology is played down and all observers do not find differences between the programs of those parties who proclaim to be on the socialist or better social-democratic line and those who are inspired to liberal ideas. (The example of the essential "centrality" of prevalent ideological formulations, and certainly of party programmes is Ghana where the party system is represented by the alternance between the "social democratic" NDC which subscribes to greater involvement of the state in the economy, while allowing for private involvement somewhat appealing to be in the Nkrumah tradition, and the liberal democrat NPP, which has succeeded to power winning two successive election in 2000 and 2004, subscribing to free market economy but favourable to measures to protect the most vulnerable society which is based on the Danquah, Busia tradition.

According to one scholar, the CCM, which was the only party in mainland Tanzania from independence to 1992 and a very institutionalised and ideological one in the sense that strong symbolic and ideal incentives were prevalent in the strategies of aggregation of interests, has maintained a "very strong nationalist and welfarist, in

¹² N.G. Wanjohi, *Sustainability of Political Parties in Kenya*, in M.A. Mohamed Salih (ed.), *African Political Parties. Evolution, Institutionalisation and Governance*, Pluto Press, London 2003, pp.239-258

¹³ R.Katz, P. Mair, *The Ascendancy of the Party in Public Office: Party Organisational Change in XXth Century Democracies*, in R. Gunther, J. R. Montero and J. Linz (eds), *Political Parties : Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford University Press, Oxford pp.113-135. Relevant to compare with the the changes in Europe in the relation between parties, citizens and members is a new research reviews by P. Ignazi, *Il puzzle dei partiti: più forti e meno aperti, ma meno attraenti e meno legittimi*, in "Rivista Italiana di Scienza politica", XXXIV, 3, 2004. See also: P. Ignazi, D. Farrell, A. Rommele, *The Prevalence of "Linkage-by-Reward"* in *Contemporary Parties in A. Rommele, D. Farrell, P. Ignazi (eds), Linkage and the Democratic Process*, Greenwood, Westport 2005

some way egalitarian culture"(Mukangara, 1999:48).¹⁴ In the 1995 multiparty general elections CCM was able to "play a role of interest aggregation superior to that of the opposition, because it had history and experience as well as monopoly of political talents". Another scholar holds a different opinion detecting a change in CCM political base articulation through the building of client-patron networks at local levels that have helped to raise funds and to retain support in the constituencies. CCM has changed insofar that it has become: " increasingly dependent on (business) networks and its government cannot avoid giving preferential treatment to its patrons in the areas of import permits, land allocation, public contracts and licences ", therefore: "the leadership composition is changing as more and more business people join its ranks in the race to parliament" (Mihyo, 2002: 89).¹⁵ CCM has remains the dominant party because of its experience and capability to orchestrate previous ideological orientation with a pragmatic restructuring of its membership and power base, changing from "charismatic to prismatic leadership".

In Zambia the ruling single party Unip lost the 1991 elections essentially because it was late to accept the change of the political system and was riddled by internal conflicts, thus giving the possibility to an alliance of various civil society groups to form a party (MMD) around the strong and very well organised Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). Unip ineptitude to "adjust": "as a major political player in the country's politics" (Momba, 2002: 53)¹⁶ weakened the party. Unip has since then been unable to resolve its leadership crisis and to mediate and choose between the radicals and reformist lines, as demonstrated by its declining electoral performance in successive elections. Meanwhile for the time being alternance to power has not produced a healthier democratic environment. The MDD coalition is riddled by factionalism, has lost the support of the powerful trade unions and has been displaying all the intolerance against opposition it had castigated when running for power.

Parties originated from liberation movements have generally abandoned all ideological pretensions and lost their strong organisational presence on the ground. But while in Zimbabwe Zanu-PF has resorted to populism, in Mozambique Frelimo has first shed marxism, it has then reinstated some measure of power for traditional authorities and has cultivated relations to the business community. Having won two contested successive elections but fearing to loose in 2004 Frelimo has revamped the organisation all over the country striking alliances with local "big men", courting traditional chiefs, and drawing on its liberation struggle credentials. Frelimo continue to draw most of international and regional support being considered one of the few good performers in stabilisation and growth of the country under structural adjustment and having on the whole been able to show that peace was sustainable.

¹⁴ D. R. Mukangara, *The Roles and Functions and Performance of Political Parties in Multiparty Tanzania*, in *African Review*, vol.26,n.1-2, 1999:25-51

¹⁵ P.B. Mihyo, *Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM): a Revolutionary Party in Transition, Tanzania*, in M. Salih (ed), cit.2002

¹⁶ J. C. Momba, *Democratic transition and the crises of an African Nationalist party: Unip Zambia*, in M. Salih (ed), cit 2002

Renamo the opposition party has no real organisation on the ground, its ethnicist appeal is localised mainly in the most deprived rural areas of central Mozambique and it has no regional support. Its representation in parliament has been very inefficient and incompetent, never a challenge to Frelimo's monopoly of expertise and institutional reforms. In the 2004 elections Renamo has lost for the third time, but this time even in its own traditional strongholds, the rural areas of central Mozambique. What is worrying in these third Mozambican national elections is not so much that elections have certainly not been so fair, but the sensational fall in participation. People voting with their "feet away from the polls" expressed apathy and worse total distrust of parties. In a country with such a tragic history abstention from the polls is a clear vote of no-confidence and the measure of the disrepute, which is dangerously falling on party democracy.¹⁷

Parties in central office

Single mass parties were funded on some measure of internal democracy, as instruments to enhance people participation to the decision making process, but only in the phase of mobilisation they were "party on the ground"; soon with the conquest of power they developed into "state-parties" in which occupation of power became the engine for the distribution of privileged access to resources.

The numbers of parties that appeared with the opening to democratisation is not a demonstration of increased participation, but rather of fragmentation and therefore weakness of the party systems. Many of the parties that appeared after multipartitism was reinstated are irrelevant. The introduction of multipartitism has not defeated the single party culture. Single parties are far from being defeated since many of them, some with different names, were the only one which had some kind of penetration in the society and have been able to maintain internal relative discipline and act as unitary forces to stay in power.

Few are the cases in which opposition parties have been able to form coalitions, which have become dominant and in all cases it was done through the personal charisma of a leader, or of a strongly personalised leadership. The fragility of coalitions is in their being built exclusively on the basis of negotiations for political positions, between leaders whose staying power depends from their performance, intended as how many resources they can assure to their ethnic or local constituencies.

Nevertheless local constituencies can exert power, depending on how they manage to organise to curb down the networks of clientele responding to the interests of the better positioned. On the positive side we should look at where and how the

¹⁷ A.M. Gentili, *Democracy and Citizenship in Mozambique*, in A. Triulzi, M.C. Ercolessi, *State, Power, and New Political Actors in Postcolonial Africa*, Annali Fondazione Feltrinelli, Milano 2004, pp.153-174

competition to access to resources at the local level has promoted the mobilisation for loyalty and support and brought to the fore new political actors who are critical of and are empowered to fight patronage. More research is needed both at the central and local level (party organisation on the ground and parliamentary activity and incisiveness) to understand how constituencies are changing and which kind of pressures they are able to put on parties conducive to fight the clientelism functional to the perpetuation, under multiparty guise, of an authoritarian and patrimonial state apparatus.

Elections - wherever they have been regularly scheduled- describe the problem of the new democratic dispensation. In almost all cases the maintenance or the conquest of state power has been marred by accusations of bad practices, boycotts, gerrymandering, forms of repression and sheer violent intimidation. The rule of law and bureaucratic legalism have been used too often not to assure a transparent and accountable process but to delegitimise the opposition, undermining further possibility of fair competition and the creation of a climate of collaborative negotiation of differences in Parliament.

Parties and party systems have been studied mainly in their function of electoral actors. If elections give a measure of the health of a political system then it is evident that parties seem to have rapidly lost most of their appeal. Decreasing participation, apathy, distrust for "politics" and "politicians" are widespread in situations in which only one party counts, while the others even the ones with consistent parliamentary representation do not exert any kind of power on government formation at the central and local level and on the formulation of public policies.

The "multiparty" system can still be best described not as a radical departure from the previous system, but a "gradual change within the political system".¹⁸ The fusion between dominant or hegemonic party and the state makes opposition a fragile competitor and alternation in power improbable although it does not exclude its possibility in the future. After all only a little more than a decade has passed since the beginning of the transition.

Responsible politics, responsible to whom?

Responsible politics means for parties to formulate political strategies which respond and discipline the demands of the constituencies, negotiating with the other political actors, respecting the rights of the opposition and the hierarchy among different institutional orders. In the first phase of the transition the links with the various types of cleavages and civil society associations were based on the functions of mobilisation, participation and integration. Declining patronage resources and the

¹⁸ International Idea, *Democracy in Burkina Faso*, Capacity Building Series 5, 1998

competition to get monopoly on the division of state spoils, included aid resources, the little space left to parties even when in power to devise alternative paths to development, has given second place to the objective to represent citizens interests and to respect the rules of fair and transparent competition for government power.

The function of representation is perceived by the general public as being mainly at the service of party leader staying power, or in order to gain power. Parties tend to present themselves as alternative governors; thus they are conceived as part of the state and draw legitimacy at the eye of their members and electors only if they succeed to exploit state resources.

Parties based on intra elite accommodation are perceived as more if not exclusively "responsible" to elite interests than to the lower more deprived sectors of their constituencies. In the majority of cases internal and interparty conflictuality and reciprocal delegitimation seems the rule. And though the Africans should be vaccinated against the virus of populism, this remains the easy way to build the political career of unscrupulous political entrepreneurs.

The consequences are an ever growing mass of people rejecting formal politics and parties as structures of political intermediation, and taking refuge either in depoliticised associationism, or in "apathy", as witnessed by falling electoral participation and in the decline in party identification, membership and mobilisation.¹⁹

The levels of party identification seem to have declined in terms of quantity, intensity, and political significance as confirmed by research conducted in the framework of International IDEA. The legitimacy problem is discussed in terms of performance, but also in the discrepancy between legal or moral standards and political standards. Violation of standards, such as widespread public corruption is correlated to the decline of ideology, where values are substituted by negotiating styles in which parties exchange public goods and offices to obtain the support once guaranteed by more symbolic and ideological means.

If there is no engagement of the civil society in politics, and for that in party politics the development of internal parties' democracy is even more problematic and unlikely. Depoliticisation is a measure of the relatively low investment of civil society in politics as party politics. Expressing disgust for "politicians", not engaging in politics and keeping a neutral or distant stand, runs the risk, -which has concretely materialised in some dramatic well known cases-, to favour the "detachment", the retreat into exclusive ethnic, religious parochial identities and ideologies which dangerously can always wake up listening to the appeal of some populist demagogue

¹⁹ M. Cowen, L. Laasko (eds), *Multi-Party Elections in Africa*, James Currey, Oxford 2002. The country studies on Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Ethiopia, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe presents very detailed elections in the framework of analysis of effective voter choice.

or worse to adhere to xenophobic or genocidal cleansing projects against those who "do not belong".

Do women matter?

Democracy puts emphasis on the individual rights of the individual citizen. In Africa large sectors of the population live in rural areas, their economies of subsistence are based on the defence and dependence from strong communal ties. Excluded or marginalised groups are cut off from the possibility of participation in major decisions affecting their future.

Very often we are lectured on the fact, that after all, women are better represented in some African parliament than in the Europeans' and not choosing women for presidential candidate is after all the norm all over the world. Did the U.S. ever have a woman President, or France, or Italy? Women rights have still a long way to go in order to be fully taken in consideration and respected, this even in mature democracies where women struggles have centuries behind. This said whether there are quotas for women representation or not, it does not tell much about the recognition of their concrete equality as citizens and as a matter of fact of their political empowerment. In electoral campaigns women are generally presented as custodian of stereotyped family values, they are "mamas", not leaders. They are generally asked to testify and promise improvements in health and education, without acknowledging the constraints in public spending, which at least will make such promises problematic.²⁰

While they are celebrated as "good mothers" , pillars of "traditional values" very rarely the burden of work women have to stand, or the ostracism, too often justified by arguments upholding the reasons of some specific "African tradition", that make their political engagement impossible, are acknowledged.

Illiterate and poor women, the majority of African women, have no "voice", and exclusion and marginalisation is intensified by existing gender relations: rural women in particular are more vulnerable to male sources of authority, like patriarchal, traditional or religious leaders, who do not regard gender equity as desirable. Civil rights as freedom of assembly and expression can be inaccessible to women because of their lack of autonomy.

These women can be hardly represented by powerful women from the upper echelon of power and education who are generally the ones who get parties attention as candidates and are in full control of power networks. The first problem of the majority of women, most of whom are "rural women", is the issue of land from which

²⁰ R. Jacobson, *Gender and Democratisation: the Mozambican Election of 1994*, Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford

depends their own as well that of their children livelihood (suffice to consider the high percentage of single mothers large families as it reads in all African countries population census or for that poverty assessments). The patriarchal definition of land rights tends to exclude women from direct control of the land they cultivate; land grabbing from powerful members of traditional or modern elite (included women) may and often does deprive poor peasant women of their means of livelihood. Whatever the number of women as candidates or elected the question of women autonomy and concrete rights and preoccupations rarely gets into parties programmes or manifestos and when it does it sounds vague and rhetoric.

It is not enough to ask how many women are represented in parties, it is important to see whom they are and what space parties give to the real advancement of policies which take into consideration fundamental women problems, take seriously the question of violence against women in the domestic and public sphere, campaign for legal and institutional reforms and guarantee protection against abuses and when in power promotes reformist policies that recognise and guarantee women's, and not only the powerful ones, full citizenship.

Research on parties as specific political actors

The research conducted by International Idea in various African countries shows how all the parties have formal bottom-up mechanisms for decision making and in their statutes guarantee members' participation to the decision making, and in the choice of candidates, leaders and policies. The legalistic approach does not subtract, on the contrary it adds, to the vagueness of internal norms and the indetermination of membership. At different levels of organisation and institutionalisation, parties are still weak channels of expression for citizen's demands in societies which are even, less than before a terrain for "equality and solidarity". Further research should go beyond the formal rules of organisation to investigate the concrete nature and the functions of linkages between parties, citizens, groups, and collectivities at the central and local levels.

The question to ask is how party systems, characterised by dominant "party in office" have transformed the party on the ground and how. If the retrenchment from politics is a rejection of democracy, or points to the incapacity of parties to respond to the challenge of the transition and if other forms of association of interests and representation are gaining ground.

Responsible politics means to enlarge participation through party organisation, but also to respond, organise and discipline, in a transparent democratic way, the party members interests and their interplay in a political environment of shared values and reciprocal accepted and negotiated differences. For the time being this shared terrain

is contested, the acceptance of the formal rules of the game does not say much about the real situation when too often rules have been used to exclude rather than include.

Parties have a central role in promoting responsible politics in democracies, this raises the question of what people think it is "responsible politics", responsible to whom, to whose advantage? For people I intend here what party members think is "responsible politics" and not only leaders, national, regional, local authorities and international officials.

In democracy people has different assets and parties organise legitimately different interests, but democracy does not grow and parties loose relevance if they exclude or discriminate, or do not give voice to the less privileged or more vulnerable sectors of society. Citizenship -as a truly fully national status pass through inclusiveness and the question of real political (through parties and vote), social (through equal access to basic rights), economic (through some measure of welfare provisions for equity) citizenship - should be at the centre of our reflection and research. This means understanding the way institutions which are central to democratic development and are meant to be acting for the negotiation of interests and for "good governance" through the promotion of the common good, actually might serve to reproduce relations of unequal power and authority, helping to further marginalise those who have no "voice", but also preparing the terrain for their reaction.

Ideas for further research

Parties are the main instruments of participation and communication between people and rulers and being at the centre of each democratic process inevitably have to bear the responsibility for whenever it malfunctions.²¹ If the basis of their legitimacy is to be "agencies of linkage" because that is the only way to maintain legitimacy, and to capture the votes which are the currency in the market of power²², it is evident we should investigate the *selective* linkages that seem to characterise the actual parties internal changes and relations.

On the other hand we should also investigate the societal transformations which have modified citizens' attitudes and behaviours and, in turn, the functions of parties: only an informed and engaged citizenry can compel parties to adopt structures and practices necessary to aggregate their interests.

The research should investigate the diverging and even contrasting tendencies at present in action within parties as well as between parties and civil society. Investigation should look at:

²¹ The conclusion on further research is inspired by recent work dealing on the question of linkages and underlining how also in Western Parties the prevalent linkage is the "linkage by reward", see P. Ignazi, D.M. Farrell, A. Rommele, *The prevalence of "linkage by reward" in contemporary parties*, op. cit

²² K. Lawson, *Political Parties and Linkages. A Contemporary Perspective*, Yale University Press, New haven 1980

1. the participatory linkage: linkage by political parties that serve as agencies through which citizens can participate in government; it was the original ideal of single parties.
2. the policy-responsive linkage: linkage by political parties that serve as agencies for ensuring that government officials will be responsive to the views of rank-and-file voters; (an ideal , idealised policy responsive party)
3. the directive linkage: linkage by political parties that are used by governments as aids to maintain coercive control over their subjects; which pertains to how non-democratic regimes maintain “coercive” control over “subjects” (rather than citizens). It is the case of many single parties (Party-state) and actual hegemonic parties
4. the linkage-by-reward: linkage by political parties that act primarily as channels for the exchange of votes for favours. The linkage-by-reward is the one which seems to have increased in importance relative to participatory and policy responsive linkages.