This article highlights trends in the post-colonial political culture under the previous liberation movement SWAPO of Namibia. Like other anti-colonial movements in Southern Africa, who had resorted to the armed resistance as ultimate form of the struggle for liberation from colonialism, it seized legitimate political power and occupies the state apparatus since the end of white minority rule. Re-organised as parties, these movements had obtained the power of definition in the political arena and shape public discourse to a considerable extent. In pursuance of their nation building, they tend to operate with and along rather strict concepts of inclusion/exclusion. The legitimacy of these governments is based on being the - more or less democratically - elected representative of the majority of the people. At the same time, however, the democratic notion remains a contested territory.

**Political Hegemony Under Swapo**

The most striking phenomenon in terms of political development since Namibia’s Independence has been the constant gain and consolidation of political power and control by the former liberation movement. From election to election during the first fifteen years, it managed to add further strength to its dominant role. Swapo had originally failed to obtain the aspired two-third majority votes in the elections for the Constituent Assembly in November 1989. During the national elections in December 1994, Swapo obtained almost the same number of votes than is 1989, while the total number of votes dropped significantly. As a result, the party obtained sole control over the law-making process through a two-third-majority in parliament. It maintained and consolidated its two-third-majority during the decade since then.

As from the mid-1990s latest a political system emerged, which displayed tendencies towards a dominant one party state under increasingly autocratic rule. For du Toit, the erstwhile liberation movement had with the election results of 1994 secured the position of an “electorally dominant

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1 Published in Nuno Vidal & Patrick Chabal (eds) *Southern Africa. Civil Society, Politics and donor Strategies* (Brussels & Luanda: Media XXI & Firmamento with Angolan Catholic University, University of Coimbra & Wageningen University, 2009), pp.199-212

2 It is the considerably revised and updated short version of an analysis on government and opposition: Melber, Henning (2007), “SWAPO is the Nation, and the Nation is SWAPO”. Government and Opposition in a Dominant Party State. The Case of Namibia” in Katharina Hulterström/Amin Kamete/Henning Melber, *Political Opposition in African Countries. The Cases of Kenya, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe*. Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI Discussion Paper; no. 37), pp.61-83. The South West African People’s Organisation (originally SWAPO) was later renamed SWAPO of Namibia and in the process of abandoning its liberation movement character into Swapo Party. Reference is made in this paper both to SWAPO or Swapo, depending on the context and/or the source/document quoted.

party”, which was “well positioned to establish a ‘cycle of dominance’”\textsuperscript{4}. Not surprisingly, no numerically meaningful opposition party could firmly establish itself as a relevant political counter weight to be considered as a serious challenge to the political hegemony of the former liberation movement.

Based on its reputation as the liberating force and in the absence of serious political alternatives, Swapo managed to entrench firmly political dominance by means of obtaining a continuously higher proportion of votes in a largely legitimate way. The far-reaching mandate encouraged the misperception that the government is supposed to serve the party and that the state is the property of the government. With the two-third majority obtained since the second legislative period beginning in 1995, Swapo-lawmakers were also securing the quasi-monopole over the parliamentary decision-making process. Furthermore, the appointment of more than half of the party’s parliamentarians as ministers or deputy ministers degraded the parliament to a rubber stamping institution, which hardly ever tried to control the executive\textsuperscript{5}. Consequently, the Constitution was changed for the first time in 1998. Despite strong objections from most other political parties and within the public sphere, Swapo’s politically elected representatives in both houses (the National Assembly and the National Council) executed the constitutional modification allowing its President a third term as Head of State\textsuperscript{6}. The same year (1998), the country joined a war in the DR Congo as a result of a personally ordered intervention by the Head of State. Neither the Cabinet nor the Parliament was considered with the matter.

Critical voices on these and other issues were and continue to be labelled as unpatriotic elements. Loyalty to Namibia is equated with loyalty to Swapo’s policy and in particular the policy executed by the party’s President. As legacy of both colonialism and the struggle against foreign rule a critical assessment concluded already in the mid-1990s that a “psychosis of fear is permeating the entire Namibian society”\textsuperscript{7}. A culture of silence has since then become a constitutive part of Namibia’s political realities, in which “good patriots” don’t criticise. Dissenting views are marginalised. Nation building efforts take place at the expense of minorities. Gay-bashing and xenophobic sentiments are among the repertoire of the highest political office bearers, often combined with an “anti-white” slant. The independence of the judiciary is openly questioned when it takes unpopular decisions not in favour of the government’s political will. The weekly Swapo newspaper “Namibia Today” attacks those not in line with what is considered (in a narrow sense of the meaning) the defined party policy in the most vulgar way and uses name-calling as a comfortable strategy to avoid arguments over subject matters. Party officials (including members of Cabinet) have articulated on numerous occasions their undemocratic views to the extent of voicing unconstitutional demands without being corrected by the party leadership or government.


\textsuperscript{7} Diescho, Joseph (2008), ‘President And Other Leaders In Violation Of The Constitution’, The Namibian, 5 December, p.16.
Self-enrichment by higher-ranking officials and politicians utilising their access to the state apparatus has so far been tolerated at the expense of public morale and illustrates the emergence of a new post-colonial class interest among the political elite. The practices applied in pursuance of such a strategy guided by material self-interests of the new elite are anything but consolidating a culture of transparency and accountability and hence also undermine the democratic process and its consolidation. Those who have the courage to act as whistle blowers are often themselves the subject of inquest, face disciplinary punishment and are accused of betraying the national interest.

The parliamentary and presidential elections on 15 and 16 November 2004 provided the so far latest results to illustrate the overwhelming dominance of the party in power. The way in which party political office bearers as public servants abused their access to state owned facilities during the campaign confirmed once again the existing misperception equating the party with government and government with the state. State facilities and public property, e.g. means of transport and communication, were used for party propaganda purposes during the election campaign. The state owned Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) devoted disproportional time in its news programs in radio and television to reporting in favor of Swapo. The same was partly true for the way Swapo mobilized voters ever since being in government, as it “often fails to differentiate between its existence as a party and as the government when listing its achievements”. It even goes a step further by simply refusing to be measured against other parties. When in 2004 party representatives were approached to offer their views on the economic policies they pursue, “the ruling Swapo party decided not to participate arguing that this research project was designed to help opposition parties”. Swapo’s view is simply that any information on any other party than itself is considered an undue interference into state affairs.

Out of a record number of well above 800,000 ballots (some 85% of close to one million registered voters) Swapo again secured above 75% of the valid votes and 55 out of the 72 seats in the National Assembly from March 2005 onward. During the fourth legislative period, parliamentarians represent seven different parties (previously five) with six of them sharing 17 seats. Opposition


12 The most detailed, solid and authoritative information on the panorama of both the political structures and system of Namibia as well as the policy makers and other figures of so-called public interest offers the encyclopedic volume
parties were both internally and among each other more divided than ever before, while the different party programs showed little to no substantive alternatives. Instead, ethnic-regional patterns re-surface, which Du Pisani\(^{13}\) once described as “the rise of older identities”. This ultimately benefits once again the hegemonic status of Swapo, which had so far as a power base the unconditional support from the most densely populated areas in the North, representing more than half of the total electorate. At the end, smaller opposition parties may mushroom, but remain without influence beyond the local support base:

> while the fragmentation of parties into smaller groups, often with an ethnic pitch to the voters, may have prevented the opposition vote deteriorating from its 1999 position, it also produces a bits and pieces opposition\(^{14}\).

There was hardly any doubt that Swapo had clearly retained the dominance it had consolidated since Independence. Numerous minor irregularities and inconsistencies in the electoral procedures, discrepancies in the voters’ list and the casting and counting of votes, as well as an undue delay in announcing the election results, however, provoked a subsequent legal intervention, questioning the results of the parliamentary vote. The High Court ruled in favour of the application. After hearing the complaints it ordered a vote recount. This resulted in only minor differences from the original results, leaving the distribution of parliamentary seats unchanged. The two main complainants questioned the recount procedures and registered their objections to the influence of Swapo officials in the process. However, they did not appeal in court. The newly elected members of the (4th) National Assembly were subsequently sworn in on 20 March 2005.

While the legal dispute showed “that there is scope for significant improvement in the way elections are regulated, managed, observed and monitored”\(^{15}\), the composition of the members of the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN) was during 2005 confirmed by re-appointing the relevant office bearers (including the chairman of the commission) for another term. A critical article in a local monthly magazine\(^{16}\) received a harsh response from the Director of Elections and CEO of the ECN. In a letter to the article he stated in the old centralist struggle fashion: “we are not surprised by the unpatriotic spirit, with which certain articles are published”\(^{17}\).

While a slogan in the days of the liberation struggle claimed that SWAPO is the people, the adjusted slogan for today might be that Swapo is the government and the government is the state.

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\(^{17}\) Kanime, Philemon H. (2006), ‘The Electoral Commission of Namibia responds’, *Insight*, March. In early 2008, the same official was suspended and ultimately released from his position, after he had registered the latest opposition party (see below), which was considered as an act of subversion. In late 2008, he declared that he left Swapo to join the new party.
This tendency towards abuse of state power fails to acknowledge and hence disrespects the relevant difference between a formal democratic legitimacy (through the number of votes obtained in a free and fair general election) and the moral and ethical dimensions and responsibilities of such legitimacy. As a result, also in Namibia, “the state often uses democracy to perpetuate hegemony rather than to advance rights, liberty and democracy”\(^{18}\). Several examples of recent years offer empiric evidence to substantiate the case in point. They confirm the suspicion that “the adoption of non-democratic measures is often justified against the backdrop of achieving ‘national’ objectives through a democratic mandate”\(^{19}\). The contested results of the last parliamentary and presidential elections of November 2004 are a recent case in point. The degree of dominance by Swapo seems to be more of interest to the party than the legitimacy of its mandate beyond any doubt also within the ranks of politically dissenting citizens.

As one of the few independent-minded Namibian scholars observed:

> **SWAPO has shown over the years a desire to establish a permanent relationship with the state machinery in order to protect itself, and thereby entrenching its hegemony in the allocation of resources. As a consequence of the fused party-state apparatus, it has become the norm for ministers, who are also party leaders to use officedom for party-dom, if one could use such a word. [...] These actions ... compromise the very integrity and essence of the constitutional state that ought to be nurtured because it places the political party above the nation it ought to serve. The monopolistic party has reduced the formal institutional processes of government to a mere appendix at the whims of a factional political elite.**\(^{20}\)

**Government, Political Opposition and Civil Society**

The plural, multi-party character of Namibia’s political system contrasts with the lack of substantive political-ideological differences among the major parties. As a detailed and systematical comparison documented: “Ideology itself does not seem to play a large role in Namibian politics”\(^{21}\). An analysis of the economic program of the various parties reiterates that, “there is fundamentally little to distinguish between the ruling party’s economic policies and those that would be pursued by the opposition parties”\(^{22}\).

In confirmation of this phenomenon, states: “Namibia’s main parties remain broadly centrist, and could be seen as more pragmatic and less ideological in nature.”\(^{23}\) Kaapama reaches the same


\(^{19}\) Ibid.


conclusion: “Looking at the party manifestos, […] perhaps Namibians are even more extravagant than the Americans, in the sense that they are presented with nine parties to choose from, but their policies are not significantly different.”

Joseph Diescho had already observed almost a decade earlier:

One of the strengths of SWAPO is its ability to appear to transform itself from a non-democratic, authoritarian, top-down organization to a democratic, participatory organization while essentially remaining the same. It is this style of political chicanery that makes it very difficult to form opposition against SWAPO. In this context SWAPO owes its resilience more to a lack of challenge than to its own strength.

It would therefore be somehow unfair and too one-sided, “to lay the burden of democracy on only the Government itself.” Following the political discourses within the Namibian public sphere, it is a striking phenomenon to see that it is only to a comparatively small degree the opposition parties, which pursue pro-active and interventionist initiatives. More visibility (with often not more favourable funding) obtained at different stages since Independence by civil non-party agencies like the National Society for Human Rights (NSHR), research institutions such as the Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit (NEPRU), the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) and the Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI) as well as a number of other non-governmental advocacy groups such as the Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID), the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) and the Sister Namibia Collective - to mention only some of the more prominent ones. They are in different ways engaged in the promotion of social justice and a human rights oriented culture often. By doing so, they shouldered so far the main tasks to contribute towards a democratic society, while political parties, in as much as churches, the labour movement and the private sector were all too often not meeting the expectations. One of the most prominent businessmen of Namibia observed self-critically that neither churches nor the private sector “are, in fact, sufficiently aware of their duty and still less it seems willing to do their duty of speaking up on matters appertaining to maintenance and preservation of moral, ethical and social values and standards”.

The Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN) as ecumenical umbrella body for the variety of Christian denominations, acted prior to Independence as a powerful moral and political voice against human rights violations under the Apartheid regime. Since Independence, Namibian churches have retreated from the political public sphere and avoided confrontations with the government on human rights and related moral and ethical issues to a large extent. Most prominently and sadly, the churches refused to visibly support the efforts by the victims of Swapo’s violation of human rights in the exile situation to deal with their ordeal and their demands for

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Church leaders, many of them once closely linked to the anti-colonial struggle, surrendered their moral and ethical integrity in return for an affiliation to the new political power and re-defined the gospel as a purely non-secular affair staying away from social and political responsibilities.

Similarly, the organised labour movement surrendered its autonomy in return for close affiliation to Swapo and a cooptation into the political establishment of the independent Namibian state. Once an integral part of the anti-colonial struggle, it retained its affiliation to Swapo after Independence. This offered the organised labour movement as represented in the umbrella body of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) access to the politically dominant power. But in return it implied that its autonomous bargaining power for the workers had to be surrender. The pact between labour and government all too often took place at the expenses of the workers’ interests since then and questions the role of the trade unions vis-à-vis the new post-colonial political and economic elite. A similar process of cooptation resulting from the transformation of the alliances entered during the “struggle days” into the elite pact since Independence could be observed with regard to the organised women movement prior to Independence. Women activists operating in a strategic alliance with Swapo before its seizure of political power were either isolated and neutralised or integrated into the new (male dominated) political hierarchy during the transformation of the liberation movement into the new political party in control of the government and state.

Given the relative high degree of press freedom and the impressive number of independent and politically alert media (at least in the print sector), the dominance of the ruling party is not good enough as an excuse for the absence of any meaningful counter-public. Lack of adequate public media coverage is at least as much the failure of the opposition parties and other civil society actors to provide meaningful news stories of political substance and worthwhile to be reported. Even the state-owned daily newspaper “New Era” offers remarkable space for coverage of government-critical views. Hence there is sufficient arena for articulating dissenting views – although at times with great personal risks if not for physical then at least material security. Given the dependence of many on public employment by state agencies or related institutions under the political influence of the new elite, the individual articulation of dissenting views puts the employment security at risk. This is a major set back for any strengthening of a civil society

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28 During the 1980s, Swapo members in exile (estimated at several thousand) were accused of being spies for South Africa. Under torture they were forced to implicate others. Many of them were executed, most others detained in dungeons without trial in Southern Angola. In the transition to Independence, several hundred of these so-called ex-detainees were released and returned to Namibia. They campaign for their rehabilitation and demand an explanation of Swapo concerning the whereabouts of the many missing. In their efforts to seek recognition for their case, they had approached the Namibian churches without any success. See Lombard, Christo (2001), ‘The detainee issue: an unresolved test case for SWAPO, the churches and civil society’ in Ingolf Diener/Olivier Graefe (eds), Contemporary Namibia. The first landmarks of a post-Apartheid society. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, pp. 161-184.


opposing the hegemonic power structure in place. The possible consequences of a combination of largely ethnical-regional based opposition parties and the relative passivity and lack of engagement in the political sphere by strong factions within so-called civil society therefore produced “the very familiar African scenario of politicised ethnic identities, monocratic and highly-personalised rule with no or very little opposition from the private sphere and a large-scale disengagement of a disillusioned citizenry from the political arena”, as Keulder warned.

As of lately, the appearance of a new political party might provide new impacts and change this rather gloomy perspective towards a new dynamic. The Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) was registered with the ECN and officially launched in late 2007. Its main architects were from the erstwhile inner circle of Swapo itself, including two former ministers, who were since the 1960s integral part of the exile leadership. As a result of the Swapo-internal power struggle over the succession of Sam Nujoma as Namibia’s Head of State from 2005, they were sidelined and marginalised, though representing a meaningful faction inside the party. The formation of these dissenting voices - coming from “within the belly of the beast” - as a new opposition party impacted considerably on the political landscape, and will influence the period until the next elections towards the end of 2009 in terms of political campaigns and debates more than the existence of any other party so far. The RDP could challenge the hegemonic status of Swapo at least to the extent that its two-third-majority is in question, provided that it is allowed to campaign freely among an electorate, which is not coerced and intimidated. It remains in doubt, if this will be the case.

Authoritarian Polarisation versus Liberal Pluralism

The extent to which the RDP emerges as a true political alternative to Swapo remains limited. Rather, it seems to offer more of the same. But it has impacted on the party-political map of Namibia more than any other political opposition since Independence and has sparked off a lively public debate over democratic practices and virtues. This contains the risk that the authoritarian tendencies, which had manifested themselves in Swapo since Independence, gain even more weight in the efforts to silence any challenge to the hegemonic political power executed. It is civil society, which would suffer most from the ‘collateral damage’. Unfortunately, the habits of name-calling continue to have preference in the controversies over political issues. As in the past, Swapo officials do not hesitate to respond to critical observations articulated in public by means of heavy handed, at times vicious attacks on the personal integrity of those who dare to raise views unpopular in the eyes of the Swapo functionaries. The RDP on the other hand is not reluctant to

34 At the end of 2007, the South African based Namibian scholar Joseph Diescho had blamed two leading political office bearers in Swapo of political opportunism and was quoted accordingly in a local newspaper. One of them, Hage Geingob, had been previously Prime Minister (from Independence until 2002), then politically marginalised and since November 2007 on a political comeback, when he was elected Vice President of Swapo at the party’s congress. He
pay back in the same currency. This shows that the mindsets of those, who have now parted with what had been their political home for decades, is not so different. Instead, the shared political socialisation and its resulting personality structures remain intact when clashing with each other.

On 10 May 2008 Swapo activists prevented the RDP for the first time to hold a properly registered political rally in full compliance with the existing laws in a part of Windhoek’s former township Katutura. In its condemnation of such blatant violation of its constitutionally enshrined rights, the RDP released an Open Letter to President Pohamba, in which it compared this unduly intervention with Hitler’s methods and blamed ‘neo-fascist elements’ in Swapo for this. The Minister of Education publicly declared shortly thereafter as high-ranking Swapo official that there would be ‘no-go areas’ for other political parties, since these are zones owned by Swapo. RDP responded in a statement qualifying this as ‘fascist inclination’. This discourse has since then not ceased. Swapo continues to claim that certain locations are their sole property and should remain inaccessible to other political parties. If these try to hold political gatherings there, they are by definition violating the unwritten laws, even though they might be in strict conformity with the legal provisions to arrange for such a public meeting.

The annual report released in August 2008 by the United Nations’ committee in pursuance of the compliance with the Convention on the Elimination on all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) reminded “the state party that the exercise of the right to freedom of opinion and expression carries special duties and responsibilities” and that hate speech, mostly by politicians, continued at an unacceptable rate. As the Namibian scholar Joseph Diescho observed: “The Swapo leaders and other political party leaders breed prejudice, intolerance, and the types of reactions that are becoming the order of the day in the body politic of the nation.”36 The degree of aggressive polarisation was illustrated maybe most spectacularly in a political rally held by the Swapo Party Youth League on 18 October 2008 in Katutura, when the Youth League’s president demanded that all higher ranking positions in the state apparatus and the state-owned enterprises ought to be filled only with reliable Swapo members. He was quoted as stating: “We have a political religion called Swapo and the political heaven is Swapo, and the political hell is where all the other political parties are”. As a special guest, the leader of a delegation from the South African ANC Youth League demanded with reference to opposition parties: “Destroy these political cockroaches, they are in your kitchen”.

The differences were by no means confined to a rhetorical warfare: they escalated further and turned at a number of isolated events during campaigns for local (communal) elections into massive physical violence between the followers of the two contesting parties, forcing the police on several occasions to interfere and to restore law and order by use of force. Throughout 2008, the worrying tendencies did not abide well for the forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections to take place towards the end of 2009.

voiced his frustration over this criticism by calling the academic at a public political rally in early January 2008 an “intellectual prostitute”.


36 Diescho, Joseph (2008), ‘President And Other Leaders In Violation Of The Constitution’, The Namibian, 5 December.

37 Weidlich, Brigitte (2008), ”Everybody in government must be Swapo…”’, The Namibian, 20 October.
In an unprecedented move, the respected Swapo veteran Andimba Toivo ya Toivo - a founding member of the liberation movement who spent almost twenty years as a political prisoner on Robben Island and served since Independence as a minister in three cabinets until his retirement in 2005 - showed the wisdom one would expect from a true leader. In the light of the violent escalations during 2008 he published an open appeal for tolerance and respect, in which he urged:

_We are living in new times that require new ways of conducting political struggle. The formation of new parties and the exchange of differing opinions in the political arena is a normal occurrence in the life of a democracy. The flourishing of new ideas can only contribute to the vitality and development of our nation. The present should be a battle of ideas and not of swords, and the battle should be conducted with respect for our fellow human beings._

Unfortunately, he seems to be a lonely voice of reason within the party’s establishment. Instead, the alliance between the erstwhile liberation movements in Southern Africa seems to be the unifying identity, which allows those in power to consider themselves as “the end of history”. Jacob Zuma, president of the South African ANC, visited Namibia on 8 December 2008, where he met with President Hifikepunye Pohamba and the former President Sam Nujoma. A Joint Communiqué released after the visit, stated: “It was noted that there is a recurring reactionary debate around the need to reduce the dominance of former liberation (sic!) movements on the African continent. In this regard the emergence of counter revolutionary forces to reverse the social, political and economical gains that have been made under the leadership of our liberation movements was discussed.”

In his “Letter from the President”, Jacob Zuma after his return summarized and repeated part of the deliberations in the following way:

_Ruling parties often go through certain challenges after the first decade, when the interests of different strands within the broad liberation movement begin to diverge. People begin to explore other avenues, especially when they feel they are losing control and influence within the movement. The interests of people outside the movement, locally or internationally would also come into play. […] Political analysts and all who claim to know Africans better than they know themselves tell us that it is good for Africa and democracy if the majority of former liberation movements was reduced. How do we as former liberation movements ensure that we do not steer away from our mandate of serving the poor and all our people, in the current climate of counter-revolution?_

The answer would actually be an easy one – simply by showing that the former liberation movements continue to provide the best policy choices for the majority of the people. In contrast to this ‘exit option’, which is rather a window of opportunity, views like the ones expressed by Zuma and his comrades seem to suggest that there is under no circumstances any inclination to vacate

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again the once occupied centres of political power, even if an electorate – as in the case of Zimbabwe – would vote for a political alternative. A democratic process with such a result would be considered as tantamount to an illegitimate regime change initiated by externally influenced and (mis-)guided elements willing to sabotage the project for social, economic and political emancipation, over which the erstwhile liberation movements claim to hold a monopoly. Any attacks on the liberation movement in power border in such perspective to acts of blasphemy and are dismissed as imperialist conspiracy. The articulation of political opposition is seen as a reason to marginalise, exclude and coerce those with dissenting views as a legitimate response by those in power. Instead, they could opt for a better policy, which convinces the people that they deserve to remain in political control by means of obtaining the majority votes in free and fair elections as a result of a sound policy in the interest of the people and an electoral campaign without restraints for and repression of anyone.

A Namibian deputy minister ended an opinion article in the daily state owned newspaper, in which he claimed a right to “self-defence” in response to unwanted attacks by political enemies and their allies (who are suspected in anybody not sharing the self-righteous propaganda of the party hard liners), by stating: “The SWAPO Party shall prevail against the onslaught and all tactics designed by the perpetrators of various methods of violent political abuses being meted against our party and its leadership. We the people of Namibia shall win this war, the SWAPO Party shall win this war, and Namibia shall forever remain peaceful.” What the deputy minister overlooks, is that you cannot win a war and at the same time remain forever peaceful. The choice is rather, if one wants to win a war or wants peace.

Decolonisation and Democracy

John Saul proposes as a result of the sobering socio-political realities in former settler colonies of Southern Africa to perceive decolonisation as “Liberation without Democracy”42. The track records of the liberation movements with regard to their internal practices during the wars of liberation as well as their lack of democratic virtues and respect towards the protection of human rights once in power are far reason for disappointment among many of those, who had supported the social emancipation of the colonised. Fighting against unjust systems of oppression, rooted in totalitarian colonial rule of a minority, did not protect the cadres of the movement from violation of human rights and other abusive forms of executing power within their own ranks as well as forms of authoritarian and autocratic rule after Independence.43 With the notion of national reconciliation at

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hand, the “liberators” blocked any meaningful dialogue on their disrespect for the protection, if not even active violation of human rights within the exile situation. As mentioned earlier, the surviving Swapo ‘ex-detainees’ have ever since their return to Namibia been denied any recognition of guilt or remorse on the side of the former liberation movement, which maintains that national reconciliation means not to open old wounds and therefore refuses to deal with the issue. As a result, the victims of the Swapo-internal waves of repression remain stigmatised until the present.

This particularly sensible issue illustrates prominently and despite all rhetoric on the need for reconciliation that Namibia’s dominant political culture is neither tolerant nor forgiving. The effects on the public mindset are not encouraging. In a survey undertaken by the Helen Suzman Foundation in six Southern African states Namibia was the only country in which a large majority would not accept defeat of its party. It diagnosed that “not much more than one third of respondents felt confident of democracy’s future”. A survey conducted at the turn of the century among six African countries ranked Namibia last in terms of public awareness of democracy. A summary of the report concluded with reference to Namibia and Nigeria, “the consolidation of democracy is a distant prospect in both these countries”. In terms of measured support for democracy during 2001, Namibia ranked second from the bottom with 58%.

A survey among Namibians aged 18 to 32 concludes more than a decade after Independence that “Namibia does not have sufficient young Democrats to make the consolidation of democracy a foregone conclusion” and the same statement is completed in a follow up study with the not so flattering diagnosis that “Namibians are high in partisanship and low in cognitive skills”. This touches on aspects of what could be termed the authoritarian character, resulting from the oppressive systems of both the settler colonial structures as well as the hierarchy of the anti-

colonial movement particularly in exile. It is therefore not too surprising that the Afrobarometer Network in a compendium of public opinion findings based on a total of three surveys in Namibia between 1999 and 2006 concludes that among the 18 countries surveyed “Namibians appear to be the most deferential to their elected leaders”\(^{52}\). In another comparative survey among 12 African countries Namibians displayed in 2006 after Ghana (70%) the second highest degree of satisfaction with democracy (69%) – against an average of 45% in all countries. At the same time, the support for multiple political parties among Namibians had dropped by 5% between 2002 and 2005 and ranked with 57% as the third lowest - below the average of 63\(^{53}\). In terms of the attitudes among citizens the latest Afrobarometer national survey classified Namibia as “a democracy without democrats”\(^{54}\).

The open question unanswered is to what extent this mixed result is mainly the responsibility of the dominant party in political power, exercising its hegemonic rule as described above, or more so a sign of the failure of political opposition parties and other civil society actors unable to get against all odds their act together. Or maybe, the question is in itself already misleading. It could well be that these are just two sides of a coin minted in the decades of oppression and resistance, which ended not too long ago. After all, the hierarchical environments both at home and in exile were for too long a time anything but fertile breeding ground for democrats, who as social products do not fall from heaven or miraculously appear at Independence Day when a national flag is hoisted to the tunes of a national anthem.

Such a rather sober conclusion is however far from a “prophecy of doom”.\(^{55}\) It merely suggests that the post-colonial reality reflects the contradictions and challenges already described earlier on by various open and thereby critically minded scholars and writers on the continent. One of them, who had done so convincingly by means of an in many ways revolutionary novel, has been Artur Carlos Maurício Pestana. He published the notes he collected in 1971 during his participation in the guerrilla war in the rainforest (the ‘mayombe’) of the Cabinda front in Angola for the MPLA later under his nom de guerre - Pepetela. As a narrative it offers a remarkable degree of sensitivity and insight into the complexity (and limits) of social transformation subsequent to a situation of armed resistance against foreign occupation under colonial rule. During its course, the commander of the guerrilla unit (“Fearless”) explains to the political commissar (“New World”), for whom more than just incidentally he ultimately sacrifices his life in battle, within a revealing dialogue:

*We don’t share the same ideals. […] You are the machine type, one of those who is 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*


\(^{55}\) In October 2007, the Deputy Minister for Justice (a son of the former President Nujoma) during a parliamentary debate on national reconciliation singled out Joseph Diescho and myself together with the director of the National Society for Human Rights as individuals, who would undermine nation building and threaten stability. He then labeled the author of this chapter as “infamous prophet of doom”.

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, adventurist. 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.”

This conversation is more than fiction. It sets the parameters and social constraints for several post-colonial societies in Southern Africa with a history of armed resistance against settler colonialism. Namibia is one among these.

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