THE TRANSITION TO MULTI-PARTY POLITICS IN LUSOPHONE AFRICA
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The main question being asked today about Black Africa is whether the transition to democracy is viable. Will the current move towards multi-party democratic systems on the continent become permanent? Or rather, will the multi-party elections now taking place usher in recognisably more democratic political systems?

I shall return at the end of my article to this exceedingly hard issue. Here, I propose only the most minimal possible definition – that is, a political system in which the political opposition can form, organize, compete in free and fair elections and take power if elected. It will not have escaped the reader that even this minimal definition raises a number of questions, questions which are not unrelated to the more substantial issue of the possible and plausible meanings of democracy in the African context. What, for example, does opposition mean? And even more to the point, what is the role of the opposition in an African multi-party political system?

SUCH A DIVERSE LUSOPHONE AFRICA

Let me, for the moment, leave these questions aside and focus on the experience of Lusophone Africa. Why the Lusophone countries, other than the fact that I have some specialist interest in them? As it turns out, the recent history of these five African countries provides us with a most interesting range of experiences, the contemporary history of which may hold some insights into the more general question of the democratic transition in Africa. And this for two sets of reasons.

The first has to do with what these five countries have in common. Most obviously, they share the Lusophone colonial heritage, a heritage quite distinct from that of the other two main colonial powers: Britain and France. Whether it is the long legacy of Afro-Portuguese contact, the creation of creole societies or even the influence of a severely bureaucratic dictatorship since 1926, this heritage cannot but have had a profound impact on these five societies.
The five also have in common a history of militant anti-colonialism in which the parties which eventually took power at independence all belonged to a single over-arching nationalist grouping (the Conferência das Organizações nacionalistas das colónias portuguesas, or CONCP), driven by the three nationalist organizations from Guiné, Angola and Mozambique fighting guerrilla wars against the Portuguese. The governments which took power at independence in these five countries were all committed to socialism, even if there were some crucially important differences in their ideological position.

The second, and perhaps even more instructive, reason has to do with what makes Lusophone Africa so diverse. Indeed, if one were to try to find a cross-section of countries representative of the continent’s complexities, one could hardly improve on the sample of the five furnished here.

Cape Verde, an archipelago of ten islands suffering from Sahelian climatic conditions, is a creole society perhaps more akin to those found in the Caribbean than any other African island States (1). São Tomé e Príncipe is yet another type of creole community, rather more “African” than Cape Verde socially and culturally. Guinea Bissau is distinct from the other four in being a small West African State, closely linked with and best compared to its neighbours in terms of history and of its ethnic, social, political and religious make up. For good measure Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau are unique in Africa as having been separate independent countries ruled by the same party until 1980.

Angola and Mozambique are, of course, rather more similar in that they are both large, heterogeneous former settler colonies. Yet, even here, there are important differences which have had profound political consequences. Angola is in many ways comparable to its immediate neighbour Zaire both in its natural resources and socio-ethnic composition. Yet Luanda (and to a lesser extent some of the other cities) was, and remains, a unique multi-racial creole community which has long provided the elite of the country.

Mozambique for its part was also multi-racial in its composition – here with an Indian community composed of older established “Portuguese” Goans and a more recent Indian trading population – but much less multi-racial in its outlook. Mozambique too was far less successfully integrated as a “country” during the colonial period than Angola. Furthermore, although both countries have suffered vicious and protracted civil wars for most of their post-colonial history, these two conflicts have in many important respects been different (and these differences do matter for the present political “transitions”). Mozambique is singular in that it is the first country in Africa where civil war has been ended by a successful multi-party election in which the two former enemies participated freely.

Finally, these five countries have had as distinct transitions to multi-party politics as one has found in Africa since 1990: Angola is one of the most acute cases of what one might call an “arrested transition” to multi-partyism. Cape Verde was the first African nation in which the incumbent President was voted out of office. São Tomé e Príncipe, for its part, is the first country in which the original party which had ruled since

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(1) By creole society, I mean one with a relatively homogeneous mixed race community, a recognisable common language and strong social bonds.
independence in a single-party system has been re-elected in the second (multi-party) elections to be held. So let me now briefly review the modalities of the transition to multi-party politics in these five countries.

TRANSITIONS

It would not be possible here to summarize the recent history of Angola and Mozambique, two countries with which most readers will be familiar and about which so much has recently been written. Suffice it to say that, for a long time, the governments in Luanda and Maputo refused to negotiate with their enemies (respectively, União nacional para a independência total de Angola, or UNITA and Resistência nacional de Moçambique, or RENAMO). Eventually (and for a series of complex domestic, regional and international reasons which I cannot discuss here), exhausted and their countries largely destroyed, the Angolan and Mozambican governments settled with their opponents. Peace agreements were signed in May 1991 in Angola and October 1992 in Mozambique.

Elections were held first in 1992 in Angola under United Nations supervision. Contrary to expectations, they returned a majority for the government in power since independence. The ruling Movimento popular de libertação de Angola (MPLA) obtained 53.7% of the votes while UNITA got 34.1%. The presidential results pointed in the same direction. In the first round, the incumbent, José Eduardo dos Santos, polled 49.7% and the UNITA leader, Jonas Savimbi, 40.07%. A second round was due to be held since dos Santos was short of the 50% mark.

The leader of the opposition refused the electoral verdict. War started again. Another peace accord (the Lusaka Protocol) was signed (although, significantly, not by the two leaders) in November 1994. Again a cease-fire was agreed and its implementation is now supervised by a much strengthened UN presence. Opposition and government are supposed to work together to allow the long-delayed second round of the presidential elections to be held and the transition to multi-party politics to be completed. Will it happen? There is at this stage very little cause for optimism.

The experience of the failures of the transition to peace in Angola helped the UN to support more strongly the consolidation of the cease-fire and the preparation of elections in Mozambique. These elections were held in October 1994 and, as in Angola but not as unexpectedly, they returned the same government and President to office. FRELIMO polled 44.33% of the votes and got 129 seats (a majority) in the National Assembly; RENAMO received 37.78% and got 112 seats. In the presidential elections, the sitting President Joaquim Chissano was re-elected with 53.3% of the votes as against his main RENAMO opponent, Afonso Dhlakama, who received 33.3%.

The outlook for Mozambique, though precarious, is immensely more favourable than it is in Angola, if only because RENAMO has accepted the electoral verdict and committed itself to working as a "loyal" opposition (only last November, Dhlakama denied rumours about a RENAMO coup or the possibility of renewed violence). Events since the elections have confirmed that the restoration of peace is on course, that RENAMO is
making the transition to legitimate political organization and is now attempting to negotiate the best possible political "deal" out of its not inconsiderable electoral success. It is, of course, much too early to say what the democratic future of Mozambique actually is - or whether there can be a "democratic" future for the country. Nevertheless, even if the transition to multi-party politics brings nothing other than permanent peace in the country it will already be a most significant achievement in the political evolution of Mozambique.

The history of the transition in Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe is both interesting and complex. In Cape Verde, the ruling PAICV (Partido africano da independência de Cabo Verde) was forced to confront openly the issue of political liberalization. Domestic pressure and internal debate led to the historic decision in September 1990 to introduce the constitutional amendment (1) abolishing the one-party system and paving the way for a transition to multi-party politics. This decision was historic in that Cape Verde was one of a handful of African countries not to have a structural adjustment programme and, therefore, not to make the move to multi-party politics under strong outside political pressure or political conditionalities. Opposition parties were set up and were allowed to campaign for the legislative and presidential elections to be held early in 1991 - the former preceding the latter. By then, the sitting President, Aristides Pereira, had resigned as PAICV leader and had sought to assume a position "above politics".

The main opposition was organized around a coalition, Movimento para a democracia, or MPD, led by a dynamic lawyer, Carlos Veiga. The campaign was vigorous and open. The MPD swept to victory on a wave of anti-PAICV sentiment, obtaining 56 of the 79 seats at stake; the PAICV was humbled with a mere 23 seats. The presidential elections which followed were even worse for the incumbent, Aristides Pereira, a widely respected figure at home and abroad, who was defeated – 74 % to 26 % – by his opponent, António Mascarenhas Monteiro. The verdict was clear: a large majority of the population had had enough of the single-party regime.

Since then, politics in Cape Verde has been energetic. The PAICV has reorganized to face the challenges of working as an opposition and has pressed for the MPD to introduce a true, as opposed to "symbolic", parliamentary system in which the opposition can play its full and constructive role. For its part, the MPD has found it difficult to make good its electoral promises on economic liberalization and reducing unemployment – by far the single most important problem in the country. It has also been racked by internal dissension and a number of its prominent members have now left to form another opposition party (2).

Moves for greater decentralization – certainly a key requirement of democratization in Africa – have been very slow. However, local elections have now taken place and all parties have been able freely to prepare for the legislative and presidential elections. The legislative elections have now taken place, returning the MPD to power with an absolute majority of 50 out of 72 seats (4). Although the PAICV has complained that the MPD had abused its monopoly over communications to flood the country, it has

(2) Of course, it is well to remember that, from the beginning, the MPD was a broad coalition of very diverse political forces.
(4) The MPD obtained 63.3 % of the votes, the PAICV 29.8 % and the second opposition party, the Partido da convergência democrática, or PCD, 6.7 %.
accepted the electoral verdict. Presidential elections are soon to follow, and they are expected to see the re-election of the incumbent.

By the standards of the rest of Africa, then, Cape Verde’s experience is an unqualified success – especially when one takes into account the fact that this political transition has occurred in one of the poorest and least resourced countries in the world. Although the opposition has been scathing in its attacks on government inefficiency and corruption – itself a sign of freedom of expression – the picture is more complex. True, the MPD has behaved rather petulantly against the opposition and has not been slow in taking advantage of its hold on power. Nevertheless, there have been genuine reforms towards greater openness and accountability and efforts have been made to implement the aims of economic liberalization which had been promised. There are signs that foreign investors are now looking more seriously at Cape Verde as a country with a cheap but well qualified labour force and an attractive climate of political peace and social cohesion.

São Tomé e Príncipe’s story of political reform is equally startling. After independence, the dominant Movimento de libertação de São Tomé e Príncipe, or MLSTP, moved to establish in the country a socialist one-party system much influenced by Angola’s (its closest partner in the region). Faced by a calamitous economic situation, due in part to the departure of the Portuguese and in part to the collapse of the cocoa plantation economy, the government was eventually forced (like most others in Africa) to turn to the World Bank for succour. By then both Angola and Mozambique had also introduced plans for economic reforms. Under strong pressure to democratize, the MLSTP introduced in September 1990 a new Constitution providing for a multi-party political system. Opposition parties soon formed and legislative elections were held early in 1991.

The results, as in Cape Verde, were emphatic. The sitting MLSTP was swept away by its main opposition rival, the Partido da convergência democrática/Grupo de reflexão (PCD/ GP). The MLSTP obtained 30.5% of the votes and 21 out of 55 seats while its competitor received 54% and took 33 seats. Having felt the wind change and fully aware of the humiliation of President Aristides Pereira in Cape Verde, the incumbent, President Manuel Pinto da Costa, withdrew from the presidential contest, allowing his long-time opponent, Miguel Trovoada, to be elected unopposed – with 81% of the vote but abstention was at a very high 40%.

The situation in São Tomé e Príncipe, however, was quite different from that of Cape Verde. The country was in a ruinous economic State and was firmly in the grip of structural adjustment. The new government did not have either well-defined policies or the administrative capacity to institute fundamental reforms. Although there were a number of moves to follow World Bank recommendations and liberalize the economy, few outside investors were interested in taking over long-neglected and poorly productive plantations. Progress was slow to non-existent. Disillusion with the new regime grew rapidly into active discontent. The 1992 local elections gave the government early warnings as, overall, it lost out to its opponent, the MLSTP.

Given the poor record of the government and the growing sense of dissatisfaction throughout the country, President Trovoada eventually resolved to dissolve the National Assembly (as is his constitutional right) and to call for fresh legislative elections. Held in October 1994, the elections
registered an unambiguous vote of no confidence in the PDC/GR government and returned the MLSTP to power with a majority of seats (5). Thus, São Tomé e Príncipe became the first African country to return a formerly "non democratic" ruling party to power by democratic means – much as several East European countries have witnessed the return of former Communist parties to power through democratic elections.

Although the outcome of the last election may appear to bode well for the health of multi-party politics in São Tomé, it is important to point out the very specific conditions which have made such outcome possible. Multi-party politics and changes in government have not resolved the country's deep problems. Successive administrations since 1990 have followed very similar policies with fairly similar, and relatively unimpressive, results. The country suffers from deep structural economic problems not amenable to simple solutions.

Political competition is in principle to be applauded but in the absence of concrete improvements in the quality of life of ordinary men and women there is always a danger that multi-party politics itself will become discredited. The recent and highly entertaining attempted coup in São Tomé (6) may have been prompted primarily by corporate grievances but it may also reflect more ominous moves among the military to do away with "inefficient and corrupt" politicians who have achieved very little. At the very least, it must be seen as a danger signal in a country where the military has hitherto not meddled in politics.

Guinea Bissau's transition to multi-party politics is instructive in ways different from those of the four other Lusophone countries. It follows a pattern found in several other African countries like, for example, Côte d'Ivoire or Kenya. Bissau had been under structural adjustment since 1987 and, consequently, had experienced strong outside pressure to open up the political system and to organize multi-party elections. Although the Constitution was changed in 1991, abolishing the single-party system, the moves towards genuine multi-party competition were exceedingly unhurried. Legislation to remove the impediments to multi-partyism was passed at leisure and many obstacles were put in the way of the legalization of parties by the Supreme Court. Whether this contributed to the mushrooming of political parties and to their inability to coordinate their action is not entirely clear. What can be said with certainty, however, is that while the many opposition parties quibbled, the ruling Partido africano da independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde, or PAIGC, got on with the job of campaigning.

Similarly, there were continuous disagreements between government and opposition as regards the timetable for the presidential and legislative elections as well as the constitution of the Electoral Commission. Although the obstacles were slowly overcome, the elections were delayed repeatedly and only took place in 1994. Voter registration and the actual organization of the polls left much to be desired but, to the surprise of many inside and outside the country, the elections were relatively efficiently dispatched and took place without violence. Despite strong protest by the opposition about

\(^{(5)}\) The MLSTP obtained 27 seats out of a total of 55; the third opposition party, the Acção democrática independente got 14 seats while the PDC/GR came last with 13 seats.

\(^{(6)}\) In which the conspirators detained the Prime Minister, attempted in vain to find a suitable civilian replacement and eventually had to restore the incumbent Prime Minister to power with apologies.
irregularities, the international observer corps declared the polls free and fair. In time, the opposition accepted the results.

The legislative elections saw the not entirely unexpected (given opposition divisions and ineffectual campaigning) return of the PAIGC to power – which, with 46% of the vote, took 64 of the 100 seats in the Assembly (7). The presidential contest was much closer. Although President Vieira had formally disassociated himself from the ruling PAIGC to stand as a "national" candidate, his main opponent Koumba Yalla ran a particularly vigorous, effective and forthright campaign against the President's record. The result was that, much to his surprise, Vieira failed to secure the 50% vote required to be elected on the first round (8). A second round was held amid allegations of intimidation by Yalla. Vieira in the end won a narrow 52% victory which Yalla, despite early protests of vote rigging, was minded in the end to accept – as observers rejected claims of malpractice. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that President Vieira's position has been weakened.

The main question following the elections was about the complexion of the new government and whether it would include opposition members. In the event, and after much protracted debate within the PAIGC and with the opposition, the government (9) remains firmly single party. Although a large number of ministers have lost their jobs and been replaced by a relatively younger PAIGC personnel, power continues to rest with the party that has been in office since 1974. Equally, President Vieira remains firmly in command of the government, of which the Prime Minister was his choice, and one must assume that the cabinet changes reflected his view of what was best for the PAIGC in the aftermath of the elections.

It is too early to say how well the new administration will perform. Undoubtedly, it will be helped by the fact that, since the elections were held, the World Bank's "political conditionalities" have been met and aid has resumed. On the other hand, early indications are that the government is having difficulty coming to grips with, and even more implementing, the policies which would help lift the country out of its economic crisis. Opposition criticisms have been sharp and cries of incompetence are uttered with distressing regularity. Here again, one can only fear that the failures of a freely elected government will contribute to undermine the legitimacy of multi-party elections – and, by implication, of democracy.

**LUSOPHONE COUNTRIES AS A LESSON?**

What conclusions can one draw from the experience of the political transitions in the five Lusophone countries? And are these conclusions relevant to the rest of Black Africa? Artificial as the comparative exercise may appear to be, the analysis of the recent political history of the five Lusophone countries is in fact quite instructive. Let me divide my remarks into three parts: (1) the apparent success of the transition in Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe; (2) the significance of the Guinea Bissau case and

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(7) The main opposition, Resistência da Guiné Bissau/Movimento Bafatá (RGB/MB), led by Domingos Gomes, won 17 seats while the Partido para a renovação social (PRS), led by Koumba Yalla, got 12 seats. Two other parties shared the balance of seven seats.

(8) Vieira got 46.17% of the votes cast and Koumba Yalla 21.89%.

(9) Of which the Prime Minister is Manuel Saturnino da Costa.
(3) the lessons to be learnt from the contrasting outcome of the elections in Angola and Mozambique.

The relative ease and smoothness of the transition in the two island mini-States would seem to confirm the hypothesis that multi-party politics comes more easily to such countries. Why should that be? In the case of Cape Verde and São Tomé, the following factors were certainly important in facilitating the transition. Firstly, as I have already indicated, these are two fairly homogeneous societies with a common language, common history, common culture and common religion. There are, of course, significant social cleavages, but such cleavages do not coincide with separate ethnic identities per se\(^{(10)}\). Political differences, differences of opinion and ideology are not associated with any well-defined social, ethnic, religious or regional grouping. The expression of political disagreement does not automatically assume socially divisive forms.

Secondly, and equally importantly, the formation of political parties is largely a reflection of political disagreement, political ambition, or even programmatic differences. Parties may be seen as the instrument of prominent politicians but they are not primarily the vehicle for the promotion of distinct social, ethnic, religious, regional or racial interests. The population at large considers the different parties more or less from the individual\((i)\)\(st\) instrumental perspective which is the hallmark of European democracy: that is, what will this party do for me? In both countries, people were simply tired of the arrogance which the prolonged exercise of power induced in the politicians who had been in power since independence. In São Tomé, they offered the opposition a chance but, in the absence of tangible results, resolved to sanction the government and give the former ruling party the opportunity to learn the lessons of multi-party politics.

Thirdly, in Cape Verde at least, there is a tradition of administrative efficiency and of relative political probity which makes it rather more difficult for politicians widely to abuse power and State resources for purposes of patronage. Cape Verde, for example, was one of the rare African countries consistently to be praised for its efficient management of foreign aid. São Tomé is not in the same league in this respect but there are strong social bonds and pressures which make it difficult for politicians to plunder the State for their own ends. It is simply too small a country, and one where everybody knows what is happening at all times, for such action to be either concealed or ignored. In both countries it is not uncommon for members of the same family to support opposite parties, thus putting an immediate check on the misdeeds of family members. Of course, this is not to say that family interests might not easily override political affiliation, even less that there are no patron-client networks in these two countries. It is simply to say that clientelistic politics are not the only forms of politics.

Finally, there has not been in either country a slide from authoritarianism to violent repression. In Cape Verde, despite rumours of a "leftist" coup in the late seventies, the ruling party did not as a rule jail political dissidents. Nor did it harass its opponents in the ways most commonly found in the rest of Africa. In São Tomé, the 1978 and 1980 alleged coup

\(^{(10)}\) With the possible exception of the Angolares in São Tomé who, because they were isolated from the rest of the islanders until the twentieth-century, do still consider themselves a "separate" social (though not ethnic) group. But these divisions have begun melting away in the post-independence period.
attempts led to political trials of dubious legality but although the sentences handed down were quite severe (especially given how flimsy the evidence was), those sentenced were able to leave the country after some time. Political repression did not degenerate, even if power was firmly abused. Eventually, the MLSTP was forced to recognize the failure of its authoritarianism. Furthermore, those who had been hounded earlier and thrown out of the party (chief of whom was Miguel Trovoada) did not seek revenge when they returned to power. There was no witch-hunt.

The case of Guinea Bissau is much more typical of what has been happening in Black Africa for the last five years. Although there was in the country much dissatisfaction against the regime, there was no organized and systematic pressure for changes to a multi-party system. The only seriously active opposition party, the RGB/MB, was (perhaps inevitably) based abroad in Lisbon and commanded only limited support in the country. There were, of course, divisions within the ruling PAIGC but President Vieira had managed over the years to play these divisions to his advantage and to maintain a firm grip on power. Much as the opponents to the PAIGC regime called for democracy, there seemed no immediate or even medium term prospect that their demand would be considered, let alone met.

It was outside pressure which forced Vieira to accept the transition to multi-party politics (11). Indeed, it was only when the World Bank refused to continue structural adjustment payment, for reasons ostensibly having to do with Bissau’s inability to carry out the reform programme, that the regime initiated the reforms necessary for the political transition. Vieira, in other words, only acted when he had no other choice. By the time the Constitution was amended in May 1991, Vieira had had the opportunity to study at close quarters the outcome of the elections in Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, two countries with which Bissau had close links. No doubt he drew the appropriate lessons from the rout of the two ruling parties (especially the sister PAICV) and the humiliating defeat of the two sitting Presidents (especially his “elder” and mentor, Aristides Pereira).

Over the next three years, the Bissau government moved with great care, and a distinct lack of urgency, through the steps required to make possible multi-party politics. At every step of the way, the regime had to be pushed by the opposition to concede the minimum constitutional, legal, institutional and political space needed for the transition to be more than an empty shell. Applications for the registration of parties were often delayed for the most trivial of reasons. The excesses of the secret police were curbed only slightly and the opposition failed in its attempt to do away with it entirely. Opposition politicians were harassed in subtle and not so subtle ways. Obstacles were constantly placed in the way of their campaigning – permission for which was only conceded gradually and grudgingly. Finally, only concerted pressure from the opposition parties and outside pressure secured the government’s agreement over the composition of a relatively neutral and generally acceptable electoral commission – without which the elections could not take place.

(11) It will be seen here, as in other parts of this article, that I disagree with Michel Cahen “Une Afrique lusophone libre ? La fin des Premières Républiques”, Lusotopie 1995, pp. 85-104 – on what mix of external and internal factors explain most fully the transition to multi-party politics in Guinea Bissau.
Furthermore, throughout this period President Vieira kept the initiative. He controlled the pace of the transition and refused to discuss with the opposition a mutually agreeable timetable. Until the date of the elections was announced, very late in the day, the opposition parties could not be sure how to pace their campaign. Finally, President Vieira was able to use his newly acquired status as a “presidential candidate standing above the fray” to reject demands for detailed discussions with the opposition on the “nitty-gritty” of both the legislative and presidential elections. All in all, he played his cards superbly well, not surprisingly given that he was a consummate politician of over twenty years standing.

His task was made infinitely easier by the defects of the opposition—most of whom had no political experience. Except for the RGB/MB (12), the opposition parties were little more than vehicles for the ambition of single politicians. With little to separate them in terms of ideas, policies and programmes, and little organization to sustain a campaign other than in the main cities, these parties found it difficult to stake the specific grounds on which they were going to contest the elections. Since ethnic and regionalist parties had been explicitly prohibited by law, none of the opposition parties could campaign openly on separatist issues, even if some of them obviously had identifiable regional support, if only because of the identity of the leader. As in many other African countries, then, there was a mushrooming of political parties with no particular constituency and little to distinguish them.

As in other African countries too, the opposition was singularly inept in its campaigning strategy. Unable to reach stable coalitions, to focus on a few significant campaigning issues and to pool their resources, they dissipated their efforts in urban rallies and slanging matches. Short on the required means of transport and largely bereft of campaigning skills, they failed to address the concerns of the bulk of the population in the countryside. The realization that they must collaborate more closely came too late in the day to undo the damage created by the image of opposition parties seemingly more concerned with undermining their competitors than attacking the ruling PAIGC.

In Africa, as in all single-party systems, the party in power has immense advantages against the opposition when it comes to the first multi-party elections. Not to put too fine a point on it, they control the State and all its resources, including coercion. It is up to the opposition to find ways of undermining the legitimacy of the regime. In Guinea Bissau, the ruling PAIGC was agile in its use of State resources and clever in its political campaign. While the opposition bickered frustratingly in the cities, the PAIGC was out in force in the majority rural areas—making its peace with the former politically incorrect “traditional” chiefs (or régulos) and negotiating support for promises of future benefits. There was too a sprinkling of fear sown by the ubiquitous security police who made plain their hounding of the opposition. In such conditions, it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that it was an eminently rational decision for many rural dwellers to vote for the devil they knew, much as they might have resented his excesses.

What is interesting about the case of Guinea Bissau is how closely it mirrors the experience of other African countries where similar conditions

(12) And to some extent the Frente da luta pela independência nacional da Guiné (FLING), a party going back to the fifties but which, after independence, had dwindled in importance.
obtain. Where there is little organized opposition inside the country, where opposition parties emerge only after the transition has been announced and then largely as the instruments of ambitious politicians seeking power, where the opposition fails to unite and coordinate its platform and campaign, where it is unable properly to articulate the grievances and demands of the majority rural population; where the ruling party manages to retain control over all aspects of the transition including the timetable, where it takes the trouble to run a serious campaign (as opposed simply to bully the voters); where such are the conditions it is highly probable that the ruling party will emerge the victor. Kenya is a good case in point.

What, finally, can one say about Angola and Mozambique? These two cases are interesting because they allow comparison between two countries having suffered prolonged civil war and where, when the transition occurred, the two ruling parties faced their former enemy as the main opposition party. Interesting too because, despite the assumptions of many, the governments in place won the elections. Of course, what is important in the case of Angola and Mozambique is that the elections were not merely the result of outside pressure to move to multi-party politics but the outcome of long and complex negotiations to bring civil war to an end. Why, then, did the process fail in Angola and succeed in Mozambique?

The reasoned answer to that question would be quite long to develop but can easily be summarized: UNITA and RENAMO were and are different political animals. UNITA, whatever it may be as a political and military organization, is above all Savimbi's instrument to gain power in Angola. For thirty years he has pursued the same goal relentlessly and, in my opinion, he will not be deflected from it. Savimbi is no democrat and he agreed to the elections only because he was absolutely certain that he would emerge the victor. In other words, he was only willing to play the game of multi-party elections because at the time it seemed the most economical way of gaining power. And, indeed, even neutral observers were confident that UNITA would win, such was the magnitude of the failures and abuses of the MPLA government. It can, therefore, be argued - and argued plausibly - that in Angola Savimbi managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. His campaign was not only poor but he managed to frighten away many who might otherwise have voted for UNITA. The MPLA, on the other hand, conducted a clever and professional campaign.

RENAMO, for its part, was originally the handmaiden of the Rhodesian and South African destabilization engineers. It evolved primarily as a military organization bent in wrecking FRELIMO's hold on Mozambique. Over the years it developed a minimal administration in the areas which it controlled. It was only when South African foreign and domestic policy changed, however, and very largely under pressure from South Africa, that RENAMO made the transition to a formal political organization and prepared to negotiate with the FRELIMO government. FRELIMO was above all concerned to end the civil war. It never considered RENAMO a particularly dangerous political opponent once the war was over. Under pressure, the FRELIMO regime conceded the principle of multi-party elections and prepared itself accordingly. Like the MPLA in this respect it entered the electoral battle determined to run a professional and efficient campaign.

During the period leading to the elections, RENAMO revealed itself as a serious political machine, prepared to fight tooth and nail to gain
respectability and the financial means for its campaign. Dhlakama is not Savimbi. A shrewd political operator, he knew that RENAMO would not beat FRELIMO and, more importantly, he knew that he would not beat Joaquim Chissano in the presidential contest. He saw the elections as a means of negotiating the best possible “deal” for himself and his party. This made him a realist, an ideal candidate for the rough and tumble of electoral politics and a clever negotiator of political and financial benefits. And in this he may be said to have succeeded quite well for few believed after the peace accord was signed that Dhlakama would carve out for himself and his party such a comfortable niche. Nor had many anticipated that RENAMO and Dhlakama would achieve the level of electoral support which in the end they did achieve.

Paradoxically, then, given that RENAMO started life purely as a terrorist organization, the transformation of the party into a political machine augurs rather well for the survival of peace and multi-party politics in Mozambique. Of course, all depends on FRELIMO’s attitude in the years to come. If the old practices of single-party rule make it unprofitable for RENAMO to be an opposition party, then violence could resume – although it is fair to say that the longer peace lasts, the less likely it is that RENAMO could return to the bush (especially without outside support). The situation in Mozambique is now similar to that of many other African countries where multi-party elections have taken place and where the ruling party has managed to stay in place. The political future of all these countries depends on the ways in which the transition to multi-party politics takes root locally and, especially, on the role of the opposition.

As for Angola, the situation remains tragically unresolved. So long as the peace accord does not result in the disarming of UNITA, the demobilization of the bulk of the MPLA forces and the integration of the former enemies into common structures, there will always remain a strong likelihood that war will resume. Influential elements on both sides believe that the only long-term solution is clean victory over the other. Here too there is a paradox: the elections have given the MPLA renewed (electoral) legitimacy at a time when many believed that they would be swept from power. In turn, this electoral legitimacy has given the regime a renewed mandate for continuing the war. This makes for a very unstable situation. Although elections have taken place in Angola, there has not been in the country the process of compromise and reconciliation which alone can make the electoral process meaningful. Peace and democracy are a long way off.

THE SO CALLED TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

I return now to the question of democracy in Black Africa. Much as it is to be desired that the transition to democracy be consummated, an analysis of the experience of the five Lusophone countries should induce caution. I have throughout this article used the expression multi-party politics rather than democracy precisely because I believe that they are not synonymous. Nor is it clear to me that the conditions in Black Africa – as against those in Cape Verde or South Africa, for example – are such as to make multi-party democracy in its European or American variant a tenable prospect. I shall not enter this debate here except to say that we
seem to suffer from collective amnesia – forgetting the very obvious historical fact that nowhere has democracy emerged and survived where there was not a sufficiently strong and productive economic basis to sustain such a political system.

Nevertheless, it could still be argued that a transition to multi-party politics – whether it ushers in democracy or not – is in itself a “good” thing. Sticking to Lusophone Africa, it can readily be seen that such a move was clearly more consequential in some countries than in others; and that even in those countries where it was successful, such benefits as have accrued could easily be reversed. Where the move to multi-party politics can help to bring peace, to open up the political system, to allow free expression, free competition of ideas, criticisms of the regime, and above all force greater political accountability on the government in place, then such transition is positive – regardless of whether the regime is voted out or not.

However, there are cases in Africa where multi-party competition other than in strictly controlled terms (by which I mean, for example, that ethnic or regionalist parties are not allowed) might be deleterious – I need only refer to Rwanda here in order to make the point. Equally, there are cases where it could be argued that multi-party politics have made things worse – for example in Kenya or Cameroon – not because of the theoretically admirable principles of political competition but because of the dirty and messy business which such competition can mean in practice. Nor, and it has to be said, is a multi-party political system one in which the ordinary citizens of a country are necessarily better off than they would be otherwise – as is amply illustrated by the case of Nigeria during the last civilian regime.

In the end, therefore, I fear that an excessive focus on the so called transition to democracy, or even on multi-party politics, will be at the expense of the analysis of what is really happening in Africa today. For my part, I prefer to concentrate (13) on the question of political accountability, a much broader concept which makes it possible to try to assess the extent to which power is legitimate even in countries where democracy as we know it in the West is only a distant vision. It will not do simply to dismiss all forms of political organization which do not conform to the species of political accountability which multi-party Western democracy is.

February 1996
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