

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
POLITICAL PARTIES IN KENYA, ZAMBIA AND FORMER ZAIRE

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INTRODUCTION

This study uses a comparative approach to analyse the success and failure of political parties in three sub-Saharan African countries: Kenya, Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire, also called 'Congo' and 'Zaire' in the following). The paper compares the characteristics, the development and downfall, of the main political parties of these countries, starting from their independence in the 1960s up to the mid-1990s. The aim of this study is to analyse whether there are systematic differences and similarities that might have led to the, more or less, successful establishment of democratic regimes in these countries.

The three countries have been independent for roughly the same period of time. All three countries gained independence during the first half of the 1960s, which, in all three cases, occurred after some form of unrest and rebellion against the coloniser. The Democratic Republic of Congo attained independence from Belgium in 1960. Kenya gained independence from Britain in 1963, and Zambia in 1964, also from Great Britain. They share a variety of regime characteristics. Chazan et al. (1999) classify all three countries that are the subject of this analysis as 'administrative-hegemonic regimes' (141).¹ Administrative-hegemonic regimes are characterised by a very strong executive, their bureaucracy and coercive apparatus. Additionally, Kenya, Zambia and Zaire share the presence of one dominant political party. Kenya and Zaire have also been classified as plebiscitary one-party systems and Zambia as a competitive one-party system (Bratton and van de Walle 1997). However, in 1994, the three countries had reached different stages of democratisation. Bratton and van de Walle (1997) identify the situation in Zaire in 1994 as a 'blocked transition,' as 'flawed transition' in Kenya, and as 'democratic transition' in Zambia.

The paper studies the processes and triggers behind these developments. It focuses on the role and nature of major political parties in Kenya, Zambia and Zaire, and attempts to uncover some of the effects that might have caused the different stages of democratisation that the countries have reached. The paper is divided into two main sections. The first section offers a closer look at the political parties themselves and how they fulfil, or do not fulfil, their role in the political system. The second section focuses on the environment in which the parties operate. It tries to identify the influence of civil society and international aid on democratisation and the development of the political parties.

¹ Zaire is additionally classified as 'personal-coercive' in the 1980s and as 'regime breakdown' in the 1990s (ibid.).

I. INTEREST REPRESENTATION AND AGGREGATION

The following section analyses three aspects of political parties: (1) colonial heritage, (2) ethnicity and (3) political communication. The first two issues are of particular importance in the African context. Colonial heritage had a significant impact on the shape and evolution of the political parties in Africa. Similarly, ethnicity has been argued to play a major role in African party politics. The high level of ethnic fractionalisation in sub-Saharan Africa has often been used to explain the difficulties faced by African countries in the process of democratic transition. And finally, political communication concentrates on the task of political parties to communicate political issues between state and society (Cammack, Pool and Tordoff 1993, van de Walle and Butler 1999, Ware 1996).

1.1 Colonial Heritage

The colonial heritage that the African countries obtained at independence had a significant impact on the political features and development of the new regime. Most colonies suffered from underdevelopment and a strong imbalance between rural and urban areas. They had not developed a bourgeoisie or strong civil society, and the African population had not been properly included in the political process.

Zambia was relatively wealthy compared to other African countries, mainly due to their copper production. However, as in other colonies, Zambians had largely been excluded from access to social and economic resources. Baylies and Szeftel argue that this 'ensured that the multi-party structures inherited at independence in 1964, and the governing petty bourgeoisie which operated them, would be insecure, weak and ineffective' (Baylies and Szeftel 1999: 84). And since the state apparatus offered one of the few channels for social mobility, clientelist politics led to regional and sectional political patrons.

In Kenya the development of nationwide parties was banned until 1960, political organisations were allowed only at the district level. For the election in 1961, still under British colonial rule, two major parties formed, the Kenyan African National Union (KANU) and the Kenyan African Democratic Union (KADU). Due to the circumstances, both parties 'were basically loose coalitions of the district and local level political organisations' (Barkan 1987: 218). Because of the ban of national parties and the very short time period to form them for the 1961 elections, individual personalities

and local groups, as well as regional and ethnic ties, became increasingly important for aggregating and representing the interests of the citizens.

Zaire was confronted with a similar, but more extreme, situation. Belgian colonial rule was more centralised and less pragmatic than British rule in Kenya and Zambia. Belgium tried to resist the Congo's independence for as long as they could and offered little preparation for the tasks ahead (Cammack et al. 1993). Political parties were not allowed prior to independence. Under these circumstances, 'the most active organisational framework for the activation of vote banks which competitive elections require was the numerous ethnic associations' (Young 1987: 192), some of which were very well-structured. Therefore, similarly to Kenya, ethnicity became a crucial vehicle for mobilising voters. The importance of ethnic and regional ties was also enforced by the very rapid change towards independence. In January 1960 the Belgian colonisers agreed to independence in June of the same year. Provincial and national elections were scheduled for May, which left only three months for preparation. Young highlights the difficulties of establishing nationwide parties at the dawn of independence: 'The vast size of Zaire, and virtual absence of a "national" political life open to Zairians, meant that each provincial arena at the outset was virtually self-enclosed, with its own political elites who usually lacked extended contacts in other provinces' (Young 1987: 193). In the election in 1960, almost all registered parties were regional, ethnic or local. The only two exceptions were the Parti National du Progrès (PNP) and the Mouvement National Congolais-Lumumba (MNC-L).²

The colonial heritage in all three countries enforced the role of ethnicity, regionalism and local patronage in the political process of interest aggregation and representation. Zambia appears to have had the best deal out of the three countries, and the Congo the worst, with the short preparation time for independence elections, the previous ban on political parties and its vast area. The following section looks more closely at the link between parties on the one side and ethnicity and regionalism at the other.

1.2. The Role of Ethnicity

One of the characteristics of sub-Saharan Africa is its ethnic diversity. An ethnic group can be defined as 'people who share a distinctive and enduring collective identity based

² The PNP was close to the colonialists and the MNC-L with its leader Lumumba represented radical nationalism and at the same time renounced the affiliation with a specific ethnic group. MNC-L won 33 and PNP 15 seats of a total of 137 seats. MNC-L formed a coalition government with Lumumba as Prime Minister.

on a belief in common descent and on shared experiences and cultural traits' (Gurr 2000: 5). There are two main approaches to ethnicity, the *primordial view* and the *instrumental view*. The primordial view argues that 'ethnic identities are more essential and transcendent than others' (ibid.). In this sense, people have no choice but to act based on their ethnic background. On the other hand, the instrumental view sees ethnicity as the dependent variable, which can be manipulated by other factors.

Most of the relevant literature suggests that the instrumental view is often more applicable to the role of ethnicity in these countries than the primordial view. Ethnicity can be invoked and used, usually by politicians, for the pursuit of other goals. In particular, politicians have used the argument of ethnic fractionalisation as a justification for installing or maintaining a one-party system. Ethnicity can be used and invoked as a major political platform. However, if political parties monopolise, or become monopolised by, the issue of ethnicity, they might lose the ability to perform their tasks, such as interest aggregation, representation and legitimate exercise of power within the state. The salience of ethnicity could hinder the willingness and ability to negotiate and to compromise with representatives of other sections of society, such as with parties from other ethnic groups. The following section tries to analyse the following hypothesis:

H₁: The more central the issue of ethnicity is to the political process, the less democratic³ are the political parties involved.

In Zambia there are about 70 ethnic groups, with the largest constituting about 27% of the total population. In comparison there are only about 40 groups in Kenya, where the largest group makes up about 22% of the total population. The Congo has a particularly high level of ethnic fractionalisation with approximately 250 ethnic groups.⁴ Looking at the three countries in question, by the early 1990s ethnicity played a major role in Zaire and was more salient in Kenyan politics than in Zambia.

As mentioned above, in Kenya national parties were prohibited until 1959. When KANU and KADU formed in 1960, KANU represented several large ethnic groups, including the Kikuyu, claiming the support of over 60% of the population. But it did not manage to establish a sense of community among KANU followers and across different ethnic groups, since it was more a 'loose coalition of local and regional

³ In this and the following hypotheses, 'democratic' means effective, in the sense that the party fulfils its task it is assigned to in a democratic system: interest aggregation, representation and exercising power in the state.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs (January 2000) and Minorities at Risk Project, www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar

clientelist organisations that were monoethnic in character' (Barkan 1992: 171). KADU gathered those groups together that felt threatened by the Kikuyu and Luo, the most numerous and politically aggressive ethnic groups (Barkan 1987). The KADU followers were generally less urbanised and less educated. The only programmatic difference between KANU and KADU was that KANU demanded the release of its imprisoned leader Jomo Kenyatta. One year after the election in 1963, KADU joined KANU.⁵ This suggests that the ethnic cleavages represented in the two parties were not prominent enough to remain in opposition and to represent certain ethnic groups, while sacrificing better access to state resources. After the banning of the Kenyan Peoples Union (KPU) in 1969, Kenya had become a *de facto* one-party state.

Between 1969-78, competition and rivalries continued within KANU. But Kenyatta provided stability as the national leader. As he realised that he could not amalgamate the different leaders, he decided to rise above it and to tolerate local bosses, as long as they did not threaten his authority (Barkan 1992). This gave ethnic and regional groups the feeling of a certain amount of influence and power through their leaders. At the same time stability was maintained at the top.

When Kenyatta died in office in 1978, vice-president Daniel arap Moi became president. Moi was from an ethnic minority.⁶ Once in power, he took an affirmative action programme to loosen the power of the Kikuyu, the influential ethnic group under Kenyatta and KANU. However, moving Kenya from a Kikuyu hegemony to a Kalenjin-centred state resulted in increasing political instability. This led to a greater control by the Presidency over every other institution. Muigai (1995) argues that Moi created ethnic leaders and then formed alliances with them. This tactic had the advantage that the newly created leaders were loyal to the president and gave him control over who got elected to parliament or a party post. Additionally, it gave the masses the feeling that they were still represented by somebody from their own ethnic group. Moi also used highly inflammatory speeches to foster ethnic clashes in order to prove that a multi-party system would be inappropriate and increase ethnic factionalism. Before the elections in 1988, 1992 and 1997 there was an increase in ethnic clashes, supposedly provoked by Moi and his followers in order to secure victory at the polls (Ajulu 1999).

In 1990 the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD) was registered as a political party due to intense domestic and international pressure. Originally, under the Chairman Oginga Odinga, FORD had an appeal across the country and across ethnic

⁵ In the 1963 election KANU won 67% of the votes, KADU 16%.

⁶ Tugen, which is a subgroup of the Kalenjin.

lines. However, shortly afterwards FORD split into two groups, FORD (Kenya) and FORD (Asili). Ethnic issues might have been part of the reason for the split, since FORD was seen as the party of a particular ethnic group, the Luo. But it is also likely that the generation gap and personality differences contributed to the breakup. Muigai argues that ‘the collapse of the democratic alliance meant that the ethnic imperative, hitherto underplayed in the search for workable democratic unions, came into play more powerfully than ever’ (Muigai 1995: 182).

Since Moi had become president, the government has overtly pursued ethnic politics and attempted to polarise the opposition parties into ethnic based parties, in which he succeeded to a large degree. The fragmentation of the opposition along ethnic lines is one of the main reasons for why Moi has survived two multiparty elections.⁷ It seems like using ethnicity as an instrument to secure the position in power has paid off, but for the price of limited democratisation. Muigai concludes that ‘ethnicity continues to be basic and a focal point that the political elite uses for political mobilization in order to fight the intra-elite war that is national politics’ (Muigai 1995: 190).

In Zaire, ethnicity has played an important role from the very beginning of independence. It was a major factor in the independence election in 1960, which resulted in a highly fragmented parliament, too fragmented to set up a constitution. For the election in 1965, 227 parties registered, based on local cleavages, regional and ethnic claims to autonomy and the inability of the central government to enforce power, which led to the absence of national parties. Zaire also encountered ‘ethnonationalism’. Ethnonationalism ‘motivates proportionally large, regionally concentrated peoples with a history of organised political autonomy’ (Gurr 1994: 354) that demand regional autonomy. The strong sense of ethnicity resulted in high levels of ethnic violence and rebellions. After President Kasavubu dismissed Prime Minister Tshombe, who had led the Katanga secession in 1960-63, a new prime minister could not be confirmed in the heterogeneous parliament. On 24 November 1965, Mobutu Sese Seko was proclaimed President of the Republic by the army high command. The parliament agreed to the coup, which also found wide support amongst the public. Political parties were immediately banned until the new constitution in 1967 allowed two parties.

Mobutu preached non-ethnic politics and various ethnic groups were represented in his cabinet. But the inner circle of his advisers was only staffed with members of his ethnic group. Clark summarises the situation under Mobutu as follows: ‘Despite his

⁷ Other reasons being unbalanced constituencies, unsatisfactory voter registration and restrictions on the political discussion among the civil society.

policies designed to reduce ethnic strife for his personal ends, his rule has not led to the transcendence of the legacy of ethnic cleavage endowed by colonialism. Rather, his reliance on his kinsmen in his security forces, and the unintentional impetus given to forces generative of ethnic consciousness by his parasitic approaches to regime maintenance, have kept alive the possibilities for more ethnic strife in Zaire' (Clark 1995: 365).

Compared to both Kenya and Zaire, ethnicity played a relatively minor role in the politics of Zambia. The competition for scarce resources reflected less ethnic divisions than regional and provincial cleavages. Gertzel states that 'the boundaries between class and ethnicity frequently overlapped, so that tribalism was often the form of conflict rather than its essence' (Gertzel 1984: 242). When the United Progressive Party (UPP) formed in 1971, it represented less an ethnically motivated split than the 'protest by some disadvantaged groups (or those who perceived themselves as disadvantaged) against the increasing dominance in national affairs of better educated politicians and the bureaucracy' (Gertzel et al. 1984: 15).

After Zambia had become a one-party state in December 1972, President Kaunda tried to achieve a maximum coalition under the United National Independence Party (UNIP), with the use of both co-optation and repression. Bratton argues that 'his skilful balancing act amidst the competing political interests of Zambia's ethnically complex society relied on the distribution of appointments to party and state offices among leaders from the country's main regions' (Bratton 1992: 83). In 1990, a new party formed, the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD). The movement was originally led by two prominent ex-UNIP politicians. MMD had strong support among the educated elite (business, lawyers, university teachers, trade unions). It 'brought together various strands of protest which had been present in the Zambian political system for a long time' (Kees van Donge 1995: 206). The formation of the new party was not primarily based on ethnicity but centred around the demand for a multiparty system.

Based on the brief discussion of the role of ethnicity in relation to political parties in Kenya, Zaire and Zambia, the following preliminary conclusion can be drawn. Kenyatta used ethnicity less as a political instrument than Moi has done since he came into power. At the same time, there was more, though still limited, political discussion under Jomo Kenyatta than under Daniel arap Moi. The case of Kenya seems to confirm the hypothesis on ethnicity stated above. Adding the cases of Zaire under Sese Seko Mobutu and of Zambia under Kenneth Kaunda and Frederik Chiluba, adds additional

confidence about the argument that the less salient the issue of ethnicity, the more democratic the political parties. Zaire was the country with the issue of ethnicity being most prominent, compared to Kenya and Zambia. It was also the country with the least democratic party, MPR basically just being a tool of the autocratic state. In Zambian politics, ethnicity played a relatively minor role and UNIP and MMD allowed the most leverage for criticism within the party, although it was still restricted. Hence the analysis of the three cases help to confirm Hypothesis 1.

1.3. Political Communication

In the following section, I compare the scope and nature of political communication between centre and periphery in Kenya, Zambia and Zaire. It addresses the questions of who represents whom and how the interests are aggregated under the parties. Alan Ware defines as one of the key features of political parties that they 'seek to represent more than a single, narrow interest in the society' (Ware 1997: 4). In order to fulfil their role as parties, they have to represent a certain spectrum of the citizenry. However, 'the point is not that legitimacy requires equality or any other set of values, but that people believe that the political system is operated properly – that they perceive their own values are reflected in the distribution of power and benefits' (Hayward 1987: 272).

Within a democratic system it is crucial for parties to establish a working connection between the centre of the party, the party elite, and a significant part of the citizenry. Also, for the stability in one-party states it is crucial that the single party tries to incorporate the main elements of society. It has been argued that new political parties are more likely to be successful if they are based on broad political coalitions (van de Walle and Butler 1999). Similarly, Widner proposes that there will be a problem of consolidating democracy when 'the interest groups that form the basis of coalitions are small, fragmented, and without substantial legitimacy' (Widner 1997: 65). The quality of the communication and exchange of ideas and information between centre and periphery is one of the main indicators of the performance of political parties. Effective political communication needs to allow for citizens to give feedback to the politicians at the centre of the party. This can only occur in a competitive environment. A party that has lost touch with its basis, or is built upon a very narrow basis, is likely to fade from the political scene or to resort to other means to secure its position in the policymaking process.

It has been argued that one of the main problems of African political parties is that their links to their basis in society are weak (van de Walle and Butler 1999). The

following section examines the linkage between the elites and the periphery of the main parties in the three African countries. It is based on the hypothesis that:

H₂: The more active the link between the party elite and a broad party basis, the more stable and democratic is the political process.

The *Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution* (MPR), the state party in Zaire under Mobutu, clearly used a top-down approach to policymaking. Its purpose was to rule, not to represent. Callaghy argues that 'The inclusionary state party [MPR] is a weakly institutionalised arm of the absolutist state and maintains only a very limited mobilisation of the subject population' (Callaghy 1984: 6). He stresses the fact that it was 'less a political machine, and more a mere propaganda element of the state apparatus than in most African countries' (Callaghy 1984: 8). Nevertheless, even Mobutu realised that he needed some legitimacy in order to stay in power. After the collapse of the national army before Angola rebels in 1977, Mobutu introduced several changes to the political system that went further than in many other African one-party states. He allowed an unlimited number of candidates per seat and there was virtually no screening of the candidates. Half the seats of the Political Bureau were up for election and most elected urban councils were restored (Young 1987). However, there was still only very limited mobilisation due to the high individualisation of candidacies. This was partly a result of the removal of any restrictions on the number of candidates. In addition to virtually non-existing political communication and mobilisation, MPR also relied on a very narrow base. The general lack of education aggravated the task of recruiting active party members from a wide spectrum of the population. Additionally, low levels of development inhibited the internationalisation and modernisation of a bourgeoisie, which came from a small section of the population. Hence, the MPR failed both to provide active political communication and competition and to establish links across various sections of the Zairian population.

The one-party state in Zambia allowed for more competition, but UNIP, the state party under Kaunda in the Second Republic (1973-91), also could not rely on a very broad base among the population. Already in the First Republic (1964-73), UNIP was characterised by intra-party conflict and a lack of mass participation. It was a party of the petty bourgeoisie, not of the masses. In contrast to Zaire, UNIP consisted of a well-educated party elite. Most backbenchers were educated businessmen with urban experience and a cosmopolitan outlook. But UNIP did not manage to strengthen its connection with the general public. The party concentrated on the petty bourgeoisie and,

at the same time, alienated the ordinary people. Baylies and Szeftel summarise the situation during the 1970s as follows:

‘the most distinctive feature of the election in 1973 was UNIP’s inability to mobilise the electorate to a more positive participation in the new system. The election was characterised less by mass participation among the electorate than by elite participation among the candidates. In 1978 mass participation increased, but so did central control, as evident by the manoeuvres to prevent any formal opposition to Kaunda in the presidential contest and the Central Committee’s disqualification of incumbent MPs’ (Baylies and Szeftel 1984: 53).

1991 marked the beginning of the Third Republic and the return to multiparty politics. The election in the same year led to the first peaceful change in power in sub-Saharan Africa, brought about by the voters’ choice and Kaunda’s acceptance of the defeat at the polls. The victory of Chiluba’s MMD was rooted in a mass-democratic movement. The centre of the MMD still relied on a quite narrow political elite, mainly from the business community, trade unions, law associations, university professors and students. The diverse nature of the MMD clientele resulted in intense internal competition and fragmentation, This ‘lead to the continuity of a politics dominated by a maximum coalition and a presidential system’ (Kees van Donge 1995: 214). Although party politics in Zambia reached a significant part of the population, across regions and ethnic groups, at the same time it had weak ties to the ordinary citizen in the rural areas.

In contrast to both Zambia and Congo, under Kenyatta Kenya managed to create a relatively strong linkage between the rural masses and the state. The tools used for building and maintaining the link between the party elite and the ordinary citizen were (a) regular elections and (b) the proliferation of autonomous self-help organisations, *Harambee*. In the 1960s and 1970s, Kenyatta originally promoted this self-help system to reduce the burden on the government. *Harambee* meant that citizens at the local level arranged small projects to help their community. This created a strong link between the peasantry and the regime, which was particularly crucial since the majority of the population were farmers living in rural areas. *Harambee* was also a significant tool for MPs to gain local support and ensure re-election. In the regular parliamentary elections, citizens had the opportunity to cast their vote on the performance of their MP, which was usually interpreted as their success or failure with respect to *Harambee* projects in their constituencies. The elections always resulted in an unusually high turnover. Between 1961-83 ‘only 37 of the 487 individuals who had served in Parliament had won three or more consecutive elections’ (Hornsby and Throup 1992: 186). Barkan

clearly points out the crucial importance of elections and *Harambee* for the stability of the political system under Kenyatta:

‘By urging rural residents to engage in self-help and to seek assistance from their elected leaders on the one hand, and by allowing leaders to build a political base through such assistance on the other, Kenyatta forced most politicians to pay more attention to the needs of their constituents than to matters of central government policy. The combination of regular holdings of elections and Harambee cemented the link between development and politics at the local level while leaving Kenyatta free to make policy at the center.’ (Barkan 1992: 177)

When Moi became president after the death of Kenyatta in 1978, things slowly started to change. He ceased greater control over political and associational life in rural areas and constrained the autonomy of *Harambee* organisations. He also changed the voting procedure. In 1986 Moi introduced a queuing system for popular voting. This meant that voters had to queue behind their favourite candidate instead of casting a secret ballot. This led to a drop in voter turnout to 23% in the election in 1988. Barkan summarises the evolution of KANU as follows: ‘Whereas Kenyatta had viewed KANU as a coalition of local and regional clientelist organisations that embraced a diversity of interests, Moi became to view the party as a mechanism to control leaders with independent followings’ (Barkan 1992: 180). *Harambee* and regular elections made the government under Kenyatta appear accountable and responsive to the general public. When Moi came into power, he took greater control over the party and restricted the political communication and competition within the party and between the party elite and the electorate. Under Kenyatta national policies and his rule could not be significantly influenced by the general public either, the party still managed to build a connection, although rather one-sided, between the political elites and the masses.

An additional point needs to be mentioned briefly. A common characteristic of political parties in Africa is the general lack of clearly defined and specified party policies. Most main parties had the goal of achieving independence. But after the country had gained independence from colonial rule, there was a vacuum of policies and ideologies the parties could adopt. In 1967, Kenyatta launched ‘Humanism’ as the official ideology for party and state. However, this official ideology did not manage to unite the party members or to provide them with a guideline for their actions. The concept of Humanism was too shallow and too vague to give directions in questions such as economic and social policies. The lack of clearly developed policies and ideologies in Zaire, Kenya and Zambia made it more difficult for the parties to perform their task of both interest aggregation and representation and voter mobilisation.

What does this tell us about the relationship between political elite and masses and the effects of political communication on democratic transition? In general, 'The personalization of elections, coupled with the effective control of national issues by most political elites, have served to limit debate on political values primarily to elite circles and they have not become salient and divisive bases for mass mobilization' (Hayward 1987: 278). Out of the three, the country that is still furthest away from democratic consolidation is the Congo. The state party under Mobutu was based on a very narrow and not very well-educated elite. The MPR was not used for two-way communication between the political elite and the masses, but as an instrument for Mobutu to rule the country. Kenya, on the other hand, saw regular elections under Kenyatta, as well as close links between the party leaders and the electorate in rural areas. Since Moi took more control over both elections and provincial administration, KANU turned into a control instrument of the state and offered little opportunity for meaningful participation and effective competition. Zambia presents an altogether different picture. The main parties in Zambia seem to have weaker links to the population, particularly in rural areas, than KANU under Kenyatta. However, it was built upon a well-educated and broad elite. In this case, the prospects for further democratic consolidation appear to be more promising, although political communication and mobilisation of the ordinary citizen are still a weak point of the MMD. This result only partially confirms Hypothesis 2, since the country with relatively weak links between party centre and the electorate but with a broad and educated elite shows the most democratic potential.

The second part of the paper switches the focus from the parties themselves to the environment in which they operate. It intends to shed some light on external factors that influence their development.

II. THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The second part of the paper looks at two selected external aspects that are likely to have a significant impact on political parties in Africa. The first section focuses on the domestic environment, namely the civil society. The second section concentrates on the impact of foreign aid on political parties and democratisation.

2.1. The Civil Society

As it has been pointed out in the previous section, the relationship between the party elite and the electorate is of great importance for the success of both party and democracy. The quality of this link does not only depend on the initiatives of the party centre to reach out to the general public, but also on the development and nature of the civil society. It can be hypothesised that

H₃ The more active the civil society, the more democratic and responsive the political parties.

In the following section, the paper tries to shed some light on the nature and characteristics of civil society in Zaire, Kenya and Zambia.

The civil society was least developed in former Zaire. The lack of professionalised groups, local cleavages and regional and ethnic claims to autonomy hampered the potential of creating a unified force within society that could have successfully challenged Mobutu and the power of the MPR. When in 1981 thirteen parliamentarians issued a manifesto calling for genuine democratisation, they were put in detention. In the following year, the same core group formed the second party, besides Mobutu's MPR, Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS). The UDPS managed to gain internal credibility and to receive external support. Hence, Mobutu did not feel able to openly crush the movement. Instead, he used intimidation and co-optation of its founding members to render the party powerless two years later.

After the end of the Cold War and the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the protest among civil society gained new momentum. But in May 1990 students went out to protest against the government, the protest was crushed and 50-150 students were killed. But one year later, additional parties formed and demanded a National Conference, which was then held from July 1991 to December 1992. Finally a variety of political parties were represented in a meaningful institution.⁸ However, there were no strong independent institutions among the civil society, such as a free media or business associations, that could have pushed the process further.

Under Kenyatta, Kenya enjoyed a relatively free press and relatively autonomous private associations – as long as they did not challenge him directly. In particular, the autonomous associations played an important intermediary role. They

⁸ By the end of the year, the National Conference had created its own government with the leader of the UDPS as prime minister. In 1994 the two governments were merged into the High Council of Republic-Parliament of Transition (HCR-PT) with Mobutu as head of state and Kengo Wa Dondo as prime minister. Promised elections for 1996 never took place.

helped to broaden the social base and to foster the bargaining and accommodation process between state and society. As soon as Moi became president, he limited public debate, increasingly put pressure on the semi-free press and the Christian churches, harassed members of the opposition and restricted the discussion in parliament. He reduced the autonomy of private associations and banned ethnic associations, by which 'the president removed a significant network from the web of associations that cemented state and society together' (Barkan 1992: 186). In 1990 he made it obligatory for NGOs to register, which enabled him to refuse registration and hence to stop the formation of 'unpleasant' NGOs.

Two incidents demonstrate how Moi effectively weakened civil society by putting pressure and restrictions on potentially powerful institutions. When in May 1990 Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia called for the restoration of the multiparty system, they were put in detention. As will be shown below, a similar situation in Zambia did not end in detention but started off the discussion about multiparty democracy. But Matiba and Rubia could not rely on the backup of institutionalised elements of the civil society. Additionally, both Matiba and Rubia belonged to the ethnic group of the Kikuyu, which had previously held a powerful position under Kenyatta. Moi used their ethnic background to portray the call for multiparty democracy as an attempt of the Kikuyu to restore their power. In the following month, a rally was planned to demand the legalisation of multiple parties. Moi interfered again, using paramilitary action as instrument and the danger of ethnic fractionalisation as justification. Finally, in 1991 due to increasing domestic and international pressure, the Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD) formed which was the beginning of the end of the one-party state that Moi was not able to stop anymore.

Multiparty elections were held in 1992, which produced Moi as the winner with the minority of the vote. Before the election in 1997, again a rally of anti-government students was violently crushed. Due to increasing international awareness and pressure, Moi finally followed the advice of the pragmatists in his party instead of the hardliners. An Inter-Party Parliamentary Group (IPPG) formed between KANU and the opposition. They agreed that the upcoming election would be monitored by both domestic and international groups. This created the opportunity for reinvigorating civil society. There were over 28,000 Kenyan observers for the election, over 4/5 of them from church organisations. This effort mobilised large parts of civil society, particularly in rural areas.

Zambia has the most vibrant civil society of the three countries. Although during the Second Republic UNIP tried to co-opt or to neutralise competing power bases such as trade unions and business organisations, a relatively independent press developed, supported by critically church leaders. For example, the first independent newspaper, *The Mirror*, was published by the churches. Also union leaders became highly critical of the government and the party. 'These groups [business and trade unions], the chief beneficiaries of the regime, ultimately turned against it because the economic reforms it was forced to adopt by its creditors compromised their relative privilege, undermined their security and reduced their standard of living' (Baylies and Szeftel 1999: 88).

Already in the early 1980s business associations, trade unions, Christian churches and the educated urban elite united in pursuit of multiparty democracy. The labour union Zambian Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was particularly powerful. It had about double the membership of UNIP and over 80% of the formal workforce belonged to it. On the other hand, UNIP was rather weak at the local level. After a protest march by students against rising food prices was violently crushed, for the first time UNIP itself stated open criticism of the president. In the same year, the constitution was changed to allow for multiple parties, The National Interim Committee for Multiparty Democracy, which was formed in July 1990 by business people, unionists, lawyers, students, intellectuals and disillusioned UNIP members. In January 1991, this Committee turned into the MMD party, which represented a 'transformation of a loose coalition of civic organizations into a serious party dedicated to peaceful competition for power' (Bratton 1992: 86). However, the urban based political elite still relied on regional and ethnic ties to mobilise rural support. Zambia had a vibrant and coherent opposition, coupled with a national leader who did not cling on to power until the very last minute had passed, which brought about the change to multipartyism. Nevertheless, the links between the MMD and to the rural population were relatively weak. It can be summarised that 'democracy and elections are something that have happened to someone else as far as a large proportion of the population are concerned' (Baylies and Szeftel 1999: 101). Baylies and Szeftel continue by saying that 'There is an increasing criticism of the state's use of arbitrary force against opposition elements and abuse of its power to prevent pluralist politics from flourishing' (1999: 108).

This overview of the civil societies in Zaire, Kenya and Zambia show that an active civil society is certainly important for democratic political parties. However, it appears as if it is not so much the linkage between the political elite and the broadest possible part of society that can bring about change. Rather it is crucial that civil society

has a powerful representation that is united and strong in both numbers *and* institutionalisation. Only such an opposition seems to have the potential to successfully challenge an incumbent regime. Additionally, as the comparison of Zambia and Kenya has highlighted, the national leaders, and whether they are influenced by moderates or hardliners, has an important impact on the development of a vibrant party system.

2.2. International Aid

Foreign aid plays an important role in the weak economies of sub-Saharan Africa. It gives the donors considerable influence in the domestic policies of the recipient countries. It has been argued that the withholding of international aid significantly contributed to the creation of multiparty democracies in Africa. For example, some part of foreign aid for Kenya was frozen until President Moi allowed multiparty elections (Haberson 1999). In Zambia, the MMD formed, and stayed, partly due to international backing and support. After the end of the Cold War, donors of foreign aid started to pay more attention to democracy and human rights in the recipient countries. Several empirical studies however have shown that good governance consideration played a much smaller role in the allocation of foreign aid than proclaimed by the donors (e.g. Meerknik et al. 1998; Zanger 2000). This section addresses the following hypothesis:

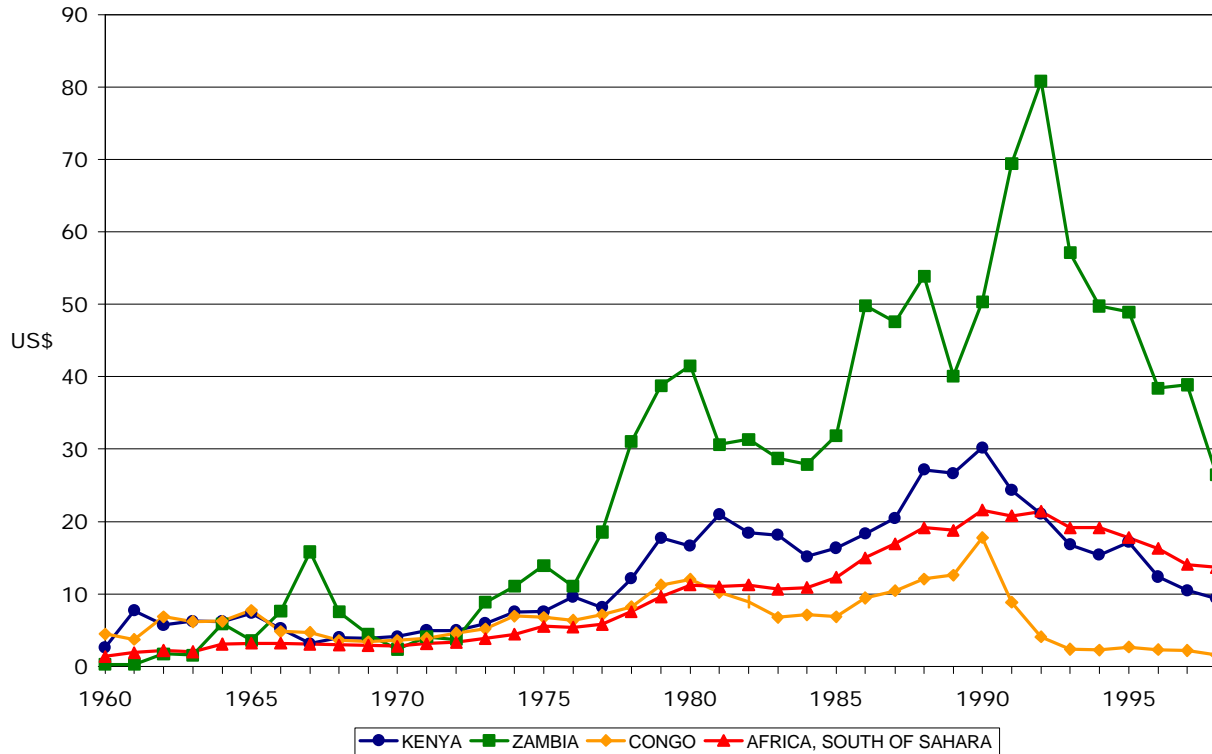
- H₄ The international community punishes (rewards) movements away from (towards) multiparty democracy with a decrease (increase) in foreign aid allocation.

Table 1 shows the flows of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Kenya, Zambia, Congo and sub-Saharan Africa, aggregated over all bi- and multilateral OECD donors.

It is interesting to note that the country that appears to have had the most successful path towards democracy receives more aid per capita than the other two countries and significantly more than sub-Saharan Africa on average. Also, Kenya received more compared to other African countries until the elections in 1992, then it falls below the average. Congo, the least democratic country of the three, receives the smallest amount of aid per capita and since 1980 significantly less than other African countries on average. Also, there is a drop from 7.79 US\$ per capita in 1965, the year Mobutu seized power and banned all political parties, to 4.87 US\$ in 1966. Aid only started to increase again after the election in 1970, up to 1974, when the MPR was declared the sole political institution. It reached a highpoint in 1980, but declined afterwards, even after the creation of the UDPS in 1982. Particularly interesting is the

drastic drop in 1990, the year of the student massacre. It appears as if international aid responded, at least to some extent, to the actions of the Zairian government.

Table 1. Official Development Assistance per capita in US \$



A less consistent picture presents itself for Kenya. The flow of aid does not respond as one would expect to the creation of the KPU in 1966 and its ban in 1969. In 1977 aid flows per capita increased until the elections in 1979. However, one would have expected donors to withhold aid until after the elections. Aid continues to rise in 1986, the year Moi introduced the queuing voting system. However, it drops drastically after 1990. In February 1990, the assassination of a minister led to popular protest against Moi. In the same year, Matiba and Rubia call for a multiparty system, are taken into detention and violent riots against the regime occur after an increase in food prices.

Development aid to Zambia gives better support for the hypothesis than Kenya. Aid decreases in 1967, the launch of Humanism as the official ideology for UNIP, and during the multiparty elections in 1968 and then starts to slowly increase again, despite the introduction of the one-party state in 1973. In line with the hypothesis, ODA drops in 1980 after the miners strike and an administrative reform that lead to greater control and further centralisation of power. Another drop in aid in 1988 coincides with a failed coup attempt and general elections. The year before and after the formation of MMD and the constitutional change to multipartyism in 1990, Zambia receives significantly

more aid per capita than before. It culminates in 1992, one year after the beginning of the Third Republic. It continues to decrease, despite the elections in 1996. Although Hypothesis 4 cannot be clearly confirmed, there are still tendencies that suggest the Western donors are not completely ignorant to the political events in the recipient countries.

CONCLUSION

This paper tried to shed some light on how certain factors influence the development and characteristics of political parties and democratisation in three selected African countries. The study showed that the newly independent countries could not start from scratch, since they were significantly influenced, and restricted, by their colonial heritage. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, political parties were not allowed to form until three months before the independence election. In Kenya, parties were only allowed on the local and district level. This hindered the formation of national parties that could have brought together different groups in society. At the same time, it increased the significance and role of ethnic groups in the political process of interest aggregation and representation. Hence, from the outset ethnicity was an important tool in African politics. National and regional leaders often used the issue of ethnicity to pursue their interests and to rise to, and stay, in power. As the comparative analysis of Zaire, Kenya and Zambia highlighted, the political atmosphere was more conducive to the development of democratic parties, the less salient ethnicity was in the political arena. Additionally, extremely high levels of ethnic fractionalisation, such as in Zaire, aggravated the task of interest aggregation and representation on a national scale.

Looking at the nature and scope of political communication between the party elite and the electorate highlighted that political parties have to be able to rely on wide support in the electorate in order to bring about change. The comparison of Zambia, Kenya and Zaire pointed out that the nature of the political support is a crucial element in determining the fate of the party. The case of Zambia showed that in order to end the one-party system, it needed a party that not only could unify the opposition, but also attracted the powerful players in society. Although the MMD did not have strong roots in rural society, it managed to mobilise the educated and urban elite, which was backed by very powerful business and labour organisations.

The paper also briefly examined the influence of domestic and international factors on the political parties. It analysed the link between the civil society on the one hand and the parties and democratic transition on the other. The comparison of the three

countries confirmed the assumption that a free press, a unified opposition and institutionalised associations are crucial for the development of democratic political parties. The overview of aid flows from Western donors to the three African countries presented a mixed picture about motives behind aid allocation. There is no question that international aid plays an important role in the domestic politics of the recipient countries. However, it is doubtful to assume that the donors' promotion of good governance consistently guides their allocation of foreign aid.

This study addressed only a selection of the elements that influence the success and failure of political parties in sub-Saharan Africa. Further comparative research is needed to paint a clearer picture of the necessary ingredients of democratic multiparty systems in Africa.

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