



# The new wave of international authoritarian populism of the 2010s has also arrived in Africa? The Mozambique and Angolan cases

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## ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the possible impact of the most recent international authoritarian populist tendencies on sub-Saharan African political systems. Contrary to the main currents of interpretation, this paper argues that we are not in face of a new international influence or role model being locally followed, but in face of the most recent example of a long political-historical path of selective assimilation of international trends to local political systems as structured after independence. We are not witnessing to poor local replicas of the most recent international wave of authoritarian populism of 2010s, but to another selective assimilation of political features to serve the existing and locally dominant systems. Through the analysis of the specific cases of Mozambique and Angola, this paper theoretically and historically discusses the nature of regimes and political systems through a critical approach on the most recent historical/political science discussions of so-called hybrid regimes, combining liberal and illiberal features, that resort to concepts such as illiberal democracies, façade democracies, electoral autocracies, semi-authoritarian states, competitive authoritarian regimes, post-neo-liberal States, or new competitive authoritarian regimes, among others.

**Keywords:** new international authoritarianism populism in Africa; liberalism and illiberalism; Angola; Mozambique.

## **A nova vaga de populismo autoritário internacional da década de 2010 também chegou à África? Os casos de Moçambique e Angola**

## RESUMO

Este artigo lida com o possível impacto das mais recentes tendências internacionais de populismo autoritário nos sistemas políticos africanos subsaarianos. Contrariamente às

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dominantes correntes de interpretação, argumenta-se aqui que não estamos em presença de uma nova influência internacional ou modelo a ser seguido localmente. Estamos perante o mais recente exemplo de um longo percurso histórico-político de adaptação das tendências internacionais aos sistemas políticos locais, conforme se estruturaram no período pós-colonial. Não se trata de réplicas pobres de populismo autoritário da mais recente vaga internacional da década de 2010, mas de mais uma assimilação seletiva de tendências políticas internacionais aos sistemas localmente dominantes. Através da análise dos casos específicos de Moçambique e Angola, este artigo discute histórica e teoreticamente a natureza dos regimes e sistemas políticos, mediante uma abordagem crítica das mais atuais discussões da história/ciência política sobre os chamados regimes híbridos, combinando características liberais e iliberais, que recorrem a designações como democracia illiberal, democracias de fachada, autocracias eleitorais, Estados semiautoritários, regimes autoritários competitivos, Estados pós-neo liberais, ou novos regimes autoritário-competitivos.

**Palavras-chave:** novo populismo autoritário internacional em África; liberalismo; iliberalismo; Angola; Moçambique.

## **¿La nueva ola de populismo autoritario internacional de la década de 2010 también llegó a África? Los casos de Mozambique y Angola**

### RESUMEN

Este artículo trata sobre el posible impacto de las tendencias internacionales más recientes de populismo autoritario en los sistemas políticos del África subsahariana. Contrariamente a las corrientes dominantes de interpretación, aquí se argumenta que no estamos en presencia de una nueva influencia o modelo internacional a seguir localmente. Estamos delante del más reciente ejemplo de un largo recorrido histórico-político de adaptación de las tendencias internacionales a los sistemas políticos locales, de acuerdo como se estructuraron en el período post-colonial. No se trata de réplicas pobres de populismo autoritario de la más reciente ola internacional de la década de 2010, sino más bien de una asimilación selectiva de tendencias políticas internacionales a los sistemas localmente dominantes. A través del análisis de los casos específicos de Mozambique y Angola, este artículo discute histórica y teóricamente la naturaleza de los regímenes y sistemas políticos, mediante un abordaje crítico de los más actuales debates de la historia/ciencia política sobre los llamados regímenes híbridos, combinando características liberales e iliberales, que recurren a designaciones como democracia liberal, democracias de fachada, autocracias electorales, Estados semi-autoritarios competitivos, Estados pos-neoliberales o regímenes autoritario-competitivos.

**Palabras clave:** nuevo populismo autoritario internacional en África; liberalismo; iliberalismo; Angola; Mozambique.

## Introduction

Taking the cases of Angola and Mozambique, this paper discusses the structuring and parcourse of these political systems and regimes through a critical approach on history/ political science discussions of so-called hybrid regimes, combining liberal and illiberal features with neopatrimonial roots. With a significant impact influencing international policies towards Africa for the last twenty years and up to nowadays, such discussions have been long resorting to concepts such as illiberal democracies (ZAKARIA, 1997), façade democracies (JOSEPH, 2003), electoral autocracies (SCHEDLER, 2006), semi-authoritarian states (OTTAWAY, 2003), competitive authoritarian regimes (LEVITSKY; WAY, 2010), post-neo-liberal States (PITCHER, 2017), or new competitive authoritarian regimes (LEVITSKY; WAY, 2020).

Although useful in other contexts, when applied to several sub-Saharan polities, and considering the cases here analysed (and possibly similar ones in the region), those classifications loose accuracy, insofar as they are usually based on the liberal-democracy analytical model and historical dynamics, emphasizing the external leverage, linkage, and agency upon those essentially reactive/passive local political systems.

Taking from the cases here analysed, it is here argued that political systems with neopatrimonial roots, be it of the first generation (post-independence), of the second (transition) or the third (post-transition), have never been simple or faulty replicas of major international dominant political models and trends. Their post-independence neopatrimonial roots has proven the ability to structure on its own terms, re-invent itself, assimilate and accommodate external influences through increased (though quiet and disguised) agency. These cases, managed to reach a higher level of effectiveness and efficiency according to its own existing path and structuring.

Their current attraction to the most recent international authoritarian populist tendencies is just the most recent example of a long path of adaptative use of international trends to serve existing political systems' objectives and structuring (HIBOU, 1999; CLAPHAM, 1996). Once again, we are not in face of local replicas of the most recent wave of international authoritarian populism of 2010s (NORRIS, 2017; NORRIS; NAI, 2017), but in face of another selective assimilation of political features to serve the existing dynamics as structured and evolved after independence.

Our purpose is to demonstrate that even in cases under major external pressure, such as Mozambique and Angola, the striking and noticeable feature is not the domestic submission of the existing political system to international dynamics and trends, but its ability to find new forms of taming such dynamics and trends to the existing – and effectively dominant – political operation in place. The dominant agency stressed is domestic, not external and the articulation between the two is approached in terms of the effectively existing

political system of neopatrimonial roots, as structured, to take the most out of international constraints and pressures to benefit the maintenance of its elites in power.

It is not a matter of not considering externalities, but placing the dominant agency indoors, being able to recycle even in cases, such as Angola and Mozambique, where those externalities have always been historically strong.

This said, the argument goes beyond the usual dichotomy between modernists/neo-liberals and neo-dependantists/neo-Marxists in their myriad echoes over the last decades, placing the main political agency outdoors (outside the continent).

The argument here sustained evolves in three parts corresponding to three major pattern transformations of post-colonial politics as approached by the dominant literature in different historical moments. Part I deals with generic post-independence political dynamics in face of Socialist and Liberal-Democratic models during the Cold-War, while part II analysis the so-called transition, and Part III is related to the articulation with the most recent international wave of authoritarian populism. Part I has a more generalist approach to sub-Saharan politics, summing-up the major common traits and patterns as described by major literature, while parts II and III take the cases of Mozambique and Angola as specific examples of the developed argument, in terms of the most recent selective attraction to the most recent wave of international authoritarian populism (2010s). In these terms, a discussion on the generic historical-political characterization of these countries does not fit within the space limits of this article, being the subject of a vast literature that is here referred for those that might want to have such generalistic background.

## I - Post-independence political structuring with neopatrimonial roots

Coming from different degrees of authoritarian illiberal colonial pasts (CHEESEMAN; FISHER, 2020), most of authoritarian single-party regimes that progressively emerged after independence in sub-saharan Africa, be it so-called socialist or capitalist, revealed some or most of the characteristics of what several authors characterized as hybridism, cocooning a dominant patrimonial operation nuclei inside an adapted modern-State bureaucracy shell; this combination is usually characterized as neopatrimonial (CHABAL; DALOZ, 1999; BAYART, 1989; MÉDARD, 1991).

Despite the sometimes contradictory and endless discussions on if and how one could typologically define a modern or neopatrimonial State in Africa, and on how such State typology would conceptually and historically differ from the same features that could be found in other places and continents such as Latin-America, Asia and South of Europe (EISENSTADT; LEMARCHAND, 1981; SCHMIDT, 1977; NELSON, 1979; SCOTT,

1963; 1972; CHUBB, 1982), it is undeniable that several Southern African countries shared several of these features, beyond all the differences between them.

Therefore, the characterization of such political patterns is analytically useful as long as it acknowledges the limits for generalization, that would lead to oversimplification and analytical uselessness. While ignoring these limits, several approaches on African political economy went further, entering the slippery combination of causality/functionalist perspectives and culturalist views, to supposedly explain all economic shortcomings of African economies resorting to a so-called neopatrimonial State paradigm. From this, it evolved to an all-fit logic and teleological explanation on why the “modern-bureaucratic” developmental State (be it Socialist or Liberal-Capitalist) was being blocked in Africa by “neo-patrimonialism”. Such interpretation led to justified criticism on its reasoning and, altogether, to the all-fit explanatory value of a supposed all-fit typology of the neopatrimonial State paradigm in Africa and its supposed teleological logics (MKANDAWIRE, 2015).

This said, considering all immense varieties of neopatrimonial rooted political systems coming out of considerable historical, structural, and institutional differences over time and across space, it is nevertheless impossible to deny political patterns of a neopatrimonial character that have become regular, common, and somewhat entrenched in several sub-saharan post-colonial political systems and that are clearly observed in several African polities within the region and do effectively present a *propre raison d'être and parcours* for its operation, above or beyond externalities and/or ideological influences.

One of such features and path is for instance the single party model, that most of these regimes followed. Despite the fact that the role of the party in African post-independence neopatrimonialism is partially different from the neopatrimonialism studied in American cities during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and, also, from the neopatrimonialism studied in South-east Asia in the mid-twentieth century (EISENSTADT; LEMARCHAND, 1981; SCHMIDT, 1977; NELSON, 1979; SCOTT, 1963; 1972), it nevertheless followed the single party model in a first moment, but according to the specificities of its polities.

The single party, regardless of its official ideological labelling – “Socialist” or “Capitalist” –, effectively and majorly became an adequate mechanism for neopatrimonial management, concentrating political power and centralising administration in strategic areas – those providing primary access to State’s resources and distribution within a rigid and selective hierarchical structure of socio-economic privilege, supporting power maintenance and the *status quo*, as much as possible.

Post-independence African neopatrimonialism started-off by being partisan in nature, soon to become presidential. In most stable neopatrimonial regimes, neopatrimonialism was able to hierarchically articulate three levels, first presidential, second bureaucratic, and third partisan (MÉDARD, 1982, p. 167). Partisan patrimonialism meant that most parties were clientelist, but when faced with decreasing revenues due to the economic crisis of

the 1970's and 1980's, some of these systems entered into stress (especially those without a significant source of foreign exchange rent, such as oil or other internationally valuable mineral export). The natural 'predatory' unbalance between ruling elites and ruled masses was aggravated and neopatrimonialism became increasingly 'elitist' and, consequently, increasingly authoritarian, repressive, and at the same time more informal, personalized and less bureaucratic. The examples of Angola and Mozambique match such party dynamics (VIDAL, 2007, 2009; FERREIRA, 1995; AGUILAR, 2003; CAHEN, 2020; HANLON, 2021; 2021a; 2015).

This favoured an also extremely common feature of such polities – the infra-institutionalization –, whereby the “real” politics happens outside the official bureaucratic realm, running in a sub-State, which is actually the effective State. Examples abound, but in the case of Angola we could mention the history of the State oil company – Sonangol – and its secret and personal management by the President and his closest aides, sometimes called a State within the State, where the real national budget is run beyond the published and legally approved budget (SOARES DE OLIVEIRA, 2007; VIDAL, 2011a). To the case of Mozambique, an example of such infra-institutionalization is the most recent mechanism within the government/party FRELIMO (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique), enabling the hidden debt scandals (*c.f. infra*).

Likewise, even though leaving aside the referred cultural determinism and political economy deductions or inductions of an all-fit neopatrimonial paradigm, and beyond the increasingly stressful economic problems and survival for most of the population, some research went deeper into other socio-political-cultural aspects underlying conflicts in these regimes. Rigid age hierarchies (closer to gerontocracies) and masculinist norms pervading these societies, rendered difficult the participation of the young and the women in politics, which are still the majority of the population in the continent (KONTE; TIRIVAYI, 2020; OLONISAKIN; OKECH, 2011).

Insofar as the control of the State in neopatrimonial rooted systems determines the access to resources and socio-economic advancement, within rigid-hierarchical State structures tending for the centralization of administration and concentration of power at the top by so-called “Big (elder) men”, it is not hard to see the rising potential for conflict in such structural bottle-necked systems (KOVACS; BJARNESEN, 2018; OINAS *et al*, 2018).

In general terms, these systems can be characterized as illiberal (which would be a definition by the negative – of what they are not – in terms of a liberal reference model). However, in specific terms, they are rooted in several common neopatrimonial practices, despite historical-political-sociological differences.

A shared experience of rising authoritarianism, chronic civil-political violence and conflict throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, along with the referred economic decline associated to the international context of the 1970's oil shocks and the 1980's debt crisis,

presented a common setting of defis, which again contributed to the re-structuring of such political systems within some common features, as approached in the next chapter.

## II – The third wave of international democratization and African illiberalism

In face of the so-called third wave of democratization (HUNTINGTON, 1991) and the liberal offensive of the 1990's, several African regimes rooted in neopatrimonialism had to adapt.

Leaving aside the discussion on the usefulness of the so-called transition paradigm (CAROTHERS, 2002), and without entering the still going discussion on the naivety of the 1990s Western optimism on liberal-democracy and free market (FUKUYAMA, 2004), it is nevertheless certain that liberal-democracy and free market gained ascendancy and impact in the Western international security and development agenda in Africa and elsewhere. It was generally seen as the desirable form of governance, expected to promote social justice and social equity (including gender equality in politics and youth socio-political inclusion), pluralism and accountability, therefore appeasing social conflict and promoting positive peace – beyond the absence of war (GALTUNG, 1969) – through the protection of individual rights and freedoms (HEGRE *et al*, 2020; PLATTNER, 2019; DAHL, 1989, 1998).

At the political level, within such dynamic complex of variables and expected outcomes associated with liberal democratization, multi-party free elections were simply selected as the corner stone to get the process moving. It was instrumentally seen as the legitimacy basis of modern democratic political power, linking rulers and ruled through accountability and the two dimensions of liberal democracy: government by the people and respect for individual freedoms. Thus, multiparty elections came on top of Western agenda and regional security strategies (PICCONE; YOUNGS, 2006; GUILHOT, 2005; CALINGAERT *et al*, 2014).

An operative and technical emphasis was put on the standardization of electoral integrity to assure its liberal-democracy effectiveness, promoted by several international organisations (NEUMAN; RICH, 2004; CAPLAN, 2005; WEISS *et al*, 2004). Compliance with such standards would expectably deploy a virtuous dynamic that would go against the neopatrimonial logic and *status quo* in several African regimes (NORRIS, 2017; NORRIS; NAI, 2017).

Some of these assumptions and expectations are theoretically and/or empirically based, some others are simply deducted or inducted, generalized and/or wished for. Nevertheless, the fact is that insofar as elections became pragmatically/simplistically associated to transitions throughout the 1990s and 2000s, endeavours of several African regimes rooted in neopatrimonialism to distort democratic processes, targeted electoral integrity. Electoral

manipulation within myriad and ever evolving technics, combined in different levels of violent and non-violent instruments according to context, became widespread. Long authoritarian practices resisted, rendering void the protection of individual and minority freedoms (BROSCHÉ *et al.*, 2020; VON BORZYSKOWSKI; KUHN, 2020; BIRCH *et al.*, 2020; KOVACS; BJARNESEN, 2018). Angola and Mozambique are again a perfect match to such dynamics (HANLON, 2021; 2021a; 2015; CAHEN, 2020; VIDAL, 2017).

At the economic level, liberalization was supposed to allow free initiative beyond State and party control, thus opening-up opportunities for social betterment through meritocracy and private initiative and hopefully contribute to destroy the dominant clientelistic-rentier practices and patronage. Once again simplistically, most of the donor's strategies of major financial institutions such as the WB and the IMF elected privatization as the corner stone to get the process in motion, followed by the 'legalization' of the informal sector, structural adjustment and poverty reduction strategies (PRSP).

Again, the result was not the expected. In most of the cases, the privatization processes were politically distorted to favour the same old ruling elites, whereby State assets were acquired at symbolic prices by members of the party-government structures, who then became the 'new' entrepreneurs, but still counting on political-economic protection and privilege of the 'new liberal' State, which was also the case of Angola and Mozambique (FERREIRA, 1995; AGUILAR, 2003; VIDAL, 2007, 2009; CAHEN, 2020; HANLON, 2021; 2021a; 2015).

Moreover, such processes occurred within an international context of an unprecedented globalization of financial markets and world economy in 1990s, which added to the recycling efforts of Southern-African political-economic systems of a neopatrimonial root in two major sequential moments.

In a first moment, up to the early 2000's, the articulation was rougher and cruder. Revenues of misappropriated public resources and of all kinds of illicit/illegal trades and traffics were increasingly diverted to newly expanded channels of money-laundering, allowed by the poor regulation on international markets. The phenomena in different degrees of intensity (increasing State deinstitutionalization) came to be known as the criminalization of the State in Africa (BAYART *et al.*, 1999), Warlordism (RENO, 1998), or in more general terms as Somalisation, narco-States or failed/fragile States.

In a second moment, especially after the September 11 terrorist attacks and the raising fear that more fragile States could slip to become a launchpad to international terrorism, a process of State re-institutionalization came to the fore, implemented by major donors and international organizations. Much technical support was provided along with aid channelled through ministries and the State budgets, with hundreds of appointed specialists, advisors and consultants, imbedded in the most influential ministries for technical support and scrutiny, as was the case in Angola and Mozambique (VIDAL, 2009; 2011; *cf. infra*).



These political systems effectively benefitted from such re-institutionalisation, upgrading its technical, legal, and bureaucratic competence, but once again not exactly in the way expected by its international promoters.

In this second moment, such acquired competence and knowledge of international global institutionalized financial markets of the upper, 'legal' level, allowed for a more sophisticated and 'legitimate' articulation of the State-holders with the international financial system. The existing systems of a neopatrimonial root again reinvented themselves and expanded to a complex international financial dimension, whereby various interrelated public/private, and African/foreign clientelistic networks became more efficient and effective on the appropriation of State resources, power maintenance and unaccountability to the general public.

The new dimension began to be revealed only in recent years, through major international financial scandals. Among other possible examples (that could include Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, DRC and Congo, to mention but a few), we would specifically refer here the cases of Mozambique and Angola, among the most revealing.

Our selection of cases does not ignore the historical and sociological differences between both countries, although we still think that there are major similarities such as a common Portuguese colonial heritage, both countries becoming independent in the same year, a common option for Socialism within Marxist-Leninist single party regimes, the adaptation of so-called Socialist single-party regimes to neopatrimonial dominant practices, civil war within the Cold War context, being so-called frontline States against Apartheid, and transition to multiparty regimes in early nineties, just to mention but a few similarities.

Nor do we ignore the relevant impact of external influences on the politics of these countries, as becomes clear from the similarities referred in terms of the international alignment within the Cold War or the regional/international context.

However, the striking point is that even under such external pressures and beyond such specificities, it was still possible for the neopatrimonial roots of these regimes to recycle and survive as dominant. The point here is to stress not only the resilience of such roots, but to show how such external influences were again subdued instead the other way around.

## A - Mozambique

In the fall of 2016, after years of dizzying economic growth since the mid-1990s, and a reputation of being an example in Africa, Mozambique suddenly turned out to be a disappointment to the IMF, the WB and the donor community at large.

By then, it became publicly known that a few State companies, with State guarantees in 2013-2014, managed to raise more than \$2 billion in international markets, and hide

such debt from State official accounts. One of the companies involved (Ematum), went as far as issuing \$850 million Eurobond in public 'secret' debt. Meanwhile, the project's benefits never materialised while hundreds of millions of dollars vanished. The inability to pay the debt forced the government to default in 2017, admitting that its debt levels (secret until then) were unsustainable. The scandal revealed schemes of misappropriation of public funds within the ruling party, government and State, and raised the concern on the possibility of a wider financial crisis in poor countries, that could lead to a 'financial shockwave' (QUINN, 2016). The US authorities accused the whole project of being a façade for bribery and kickback schemes, but the Mozambican government still did not disclose of the borrowing. Donors, who had provided about a quarter of the country's State budget for almost twenty-five years, suspended financial assistance and demanded full investigation on secret loans and missing funds (THE ECONOMIST, 2019; ARIS, 2019).

The shock laid on the fact that the government was able to conceal such major international financial scheme since 2013. This happened in a country where the national budget and public accounts were supposedly closely monitored by the international community and civil society organizations (with internationally funded structures for such "watchdog" role).

Suddenly, the reality was that poverty remained a fact-of-life for the great majority of the population (SHIPLEY, 2019; GERETY, 2018) and the transition from a supposed Socialist regime to a multiparty democracy in 1992 (ending a 15 year civil war, 1977-1992), was after all, a long road of adaptation whereby the party FRELIMO and its ruling elites, in power since independence in 1975, were again able to tame the international leverage and linkage of political and economic liberalization on its favour.

The party managed to conduct the 1990s privatization processes in favour of the old elites, maintaining all the significant private and public business sectors under the usual political dependency. In parallel and complement, the party control of the State apparatus (administration, logistics, executive, legislative, judicial and economics) was able to renew its political 'electoral' legitimacy, winning each and every multi-party election since the transition started, from presidential and legislative (1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019) to municipal (1998, 2003, 2008, 2013, 2018). Smashing electoral victories allowed FRELIMO to legislate as it pleased, including a new 'made-to-fit constitution' in 2004 and revised in 2007. Although electoral results have been constantly contested since 1994, with serious accusations and evidence of electoral malpractices and fraud, a politically compromised judicial system repeatedly and swiftly discarded all complaints (CAHEN, 2020; HANLON, 2021; 2021a; 2015).

With different elected presidents respecting two-terms mandates, and new business opportunities for major international players, an illusion was thus created that a multiparty liberal democracy was in progress, with an accountable government committed to tackle

poverty, promote development and cooperate with the international community within a liberal context of globalization.

The debt scandal revealed that the increased technical-institutional competence of the government, from early 2000s onwards, essentially served to strengthen and expand the existing neopatrimonial system up to a new, sophisticate, complex, and even more unaccountable international financial dimension.

## B - Angola

Contrary to Mozambique, the Angolan government has always had a relative leverage over international organisations (governmental and non-governmental) due to fierce foreign competition for a stake in the lucrative oil business. Nevertheless, the technical support from the IMF, the WB, the EU, and myriad bilateral cooperation partners, was also massively accepted in the late 1990s. Hundreds of international consultancy companies were hired to support the design and implementation of projects and day-to-day management of myriad State institutions, beyond the usually referred oil sector (SOARES DE OLIVEIRA, 2015; VIDAL, 2011).

As in Mozambique, the party in power since independence in 1975 – the MPLA –, reinforced its strength and might at all levels through the 1990s transition. It was able to conduct privatizations that resembled a mere distribution of State assets to the same old elites in power, with a tight political control over the public and private sectors of the economy (FERREIRA, 1995; AGUILAR, 2003). The partisan control of the State apparatus – administration, logistics, media, executive, legislative and judicial power –, cumulatively with record-high economic growth rates up to 2013/14 (from the oil Bonanza of 2002-2014), reflected in three consecutive electoral victories with more than two-thirds of voting in each plebiscite since the end of the civil war – 2008, 2012, 2017 (VIDAL, 2017). The government kept announcing a supposed significant reduction of poverty, while investors looked at the country as the new rising economy in Africa (SOARES DE OLIVEIRA, 2015; FERNANDES, 2015).

The record-high oil revenues even prompted an ambitious internationalization of Angolan (elite) capital, heavily invested in Portuguese strategic sectors such as banks, communications, energy, media, and insurances. However, the steady decrease in oil prices since the second semester of 2014 – with oil still representing one-third of the GDP and over 95% of the government's exports (THE WORLD BANK, 2020) – ended up revealing that the essentials of the political-economic system remained.

As in Mozambique, major financial scandals with complex international ramifications erupted in 2017 and continued uninterrupted from then on. The new administration

of President João Lourenço – elected in September 2017 as the chosen successor of José Eduardo dos Santos by the same party in power, after 38 years of Dos Santos presidency –, assumed “a looted State with empty coffers” as Lourenço himself complaint (COSTA, 2018). The announced financial hole pushed forward his electoral campaign promises to fight corruption, attempting to recover part of the looting, estimated in October 2020 at circa \$US 24 billion, but officially expected to be much higher (KEELER, 2020).

As in the Mozambique case, although in a much higher financial volume (due to the higher amounts involved coming from the oil revenues), the disclosed cases revealed the increasing technical competence, international dimension, sophistication, and complexity of the neopatrimonial rooted management system, orchestrated by the top members of the State, party and military structures, obviously including the former president’s family, supported by international top-consultancy hired all over the world.

The son of the former President, José Filomeno dos Santos, was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison in August 2020 as former head of Angola’s \$500bn Wealth Sovereign Fund - WSF, together with former governor of the Bank of Angola, Valter Filipe da Silva, and the WSF asset manager Jean Claude Morais, for fraud, misappropriation of funds and money laundering. The case reported to a 2017 transaction (in the final weeks of his father’s rule) diverting \$500 million from the central bank in a scheme that planned to divert \$1.5 billion from Angola’s WSF under the argument that it would serve to secretly support the MPLA government by placing \$300 million weekly in the local-currency market to support the Angolan currency during the electoral campaign period in August 2017 (STEINHAUSER, 2020).

Meanwhile, at the same time as the government was trying to negotiate a new loan of circa US\$1 billion with the IMF in 2020, a leak revealed that a Swiss court in 2018 had frozen circa \$1.1 billion in private accounts held by a former cadre of the State oil company – São Vicente and his wife Irene Neto, the son-in-law and daughter of the first President Agostinho Neto. The new scandal was related to the concession of a government monopoly of insurances in the oil sector to a company created by Sonangol, the AAA insurances. Sonangol possessed almost in full the AAA, but progressively and discreetly transferred its ownership over the years to São Vicente’s companies in the Bahamas. Without any proper compensation or logical (financially legal) explanation, besides the usual distributive patronage networking, Sonangol ended up in 2012 with mere 10%, while São Vicente assumed 90%. In the meantime, from 2012 to 2017, AAA more than doubled insurance prices and is estimated to have obtained circa \$2.5 billion net profit in that five-year period (OLIVEIRA, 2020).

As several of the most significant businesses from 2000 onwards, this one had also to count on the authorization of the former President Eduardo dos Santos and the former head of the State oil company and former deputy-President of the Republic, Manuel Vicente – a

person politically-economically emerging since 1999 as the pivot of the central management schemes of the 'Angolan' (elites) capital internationalization. Such internationalization was based on Sonangol, due to the previously referred opacity of the company and the amount of its funds, having Manuel Vicente as its general-Director since 1999.

The sophisticate engineering of the Angolan neopatrimonial system (from 2000 onwards), is also allegedly at the basis of the biggest cases of State resources' misappropriation involving the former president's daughter Isabel dos Santos (and her late husband Sindika Dokolo), considered in 2013 the richest woman in Africa by Forbes. Their vast international corporative empire ranges from the oil sector national and abroad, to banking, TV, internet, land and mobile phone companies in Angola and Portugal and commercialization of diamonds. Part of their assets and participation in companies in the worth of billions are being frozen and/or reclaimed by the Angolan State in judicial processes in Angola and abroad, revealing extremely complex international financial operations and networks of offshore indirect participations in myriad companies and dozens of countries, full of intermediaries. Their businesses have in common the fact that, according to public prosecution, were all allegedly acquired with State funds through political influence and protection from the presidency and using Sonangol money at start (BBC, 2020).

The same allegations by State prosecutors also led to confiscate or negotiate the handover of major assets and companies of several of the most influential personalities and closest advisors of José Eduardo dos Santos, including army Generals, owners of an immense patrimony. Two of them – Helder Kopelipa and Leopoldino Fragoso –, handed over \$1 billion in assets in Angola in just one agreement (COSTA, 2020a).

In fact, the new financial-economic engineering managed not only to make the existing neopatrimonialism more effective, with assets and amounts appropriated in a never-seen-before magnificent scale, but more important, managed to make it much more efficient, enabling it to internationally launder the looting in a much 'cleaner' and sophisticated way than the traditional straightforward diversion of State money to foreign accounts (as usual in the 1990s).

The same elites that were hardly struggling in the 1990's to learn how to become entrepreneurs and capitalize its newly acquired assets (through privatization/appropriation), finally raised to the status of an international 'legitimate' business class (essentially owning rents abroad).

Important to say that the so-called fight against corruption by the new 'Lourenço' administration has been highly selective, unmercifully chasing a few for the media spotlights, such as the former President's family, while sparing (sometimes explicitly protecting, against all evidence of corruption) innumerable tycoons intimately related to the previous administration (Manuel Vicente included), that simply became recycled within the 'new' administration. The new President himself is an old top-rank member of the State, party

and military structures, as well as his wife (former minister and deputy-minister of planning for 15 years in the previous administration of Dos Santos).

In sum, these scandals in Angola and Mozambique (and several others reported over the last decade) revealed the sophistication and effectiveness of the existing neo-patrimonial roots in the political management system, through internationalization. These systems are no longer the result of authoritarian powerful “Big men” free-lancing and day-to-day rough management of State looting through whatever underground financial parallel markets, that characterized the 1990s.

After almost three decades of transition, political systems with a neopatrimonial root, in different shades and shapes, became more complex and sophisticate, with significant international ramifications, with ever effectively defused and systemically concealed forms of dominance and authoritarianism (BIRCH *et al*, 2020, p. 3-14; SODERBERG; KOVACS, 2018). Sure, they still cannot be minimally considered liberal democracies despite integrating a few liberal features. Notions of illiberal democracies (ZAKARIA, 1997), façade democracies (JOSEPH, 2003), electoral autocracies (SCHEDLER, 2006), semi-authoritarian states (OTTAWAY, 2003), competitive authoritarian regimes (LEVITSKY; WAY, 2010), post-neo-liberal States (PITCHER 2017) or ‘new’ competitive authoritarian regimes (LEVITSKY; WAY, 2020), would not be entirely inadequate.

However, within a neopatrimonial context as previously characterized, such analytical categorizations, that are still anchored within the already outdated transition paradigm (CAROTHERS, 2002) and modern developmental State, miss the main point. They approach these systems and their regimes’ dynamics from an outward analytical perspective of liberal-democracy model influence, in order to check how much of the liberal-democratic waves of the last decades have managed to penetrate these systems despite their resistance. In other words, they try to access in what degree and cases was the push towards liberal-democracy more or less effective/ineffective, in what contexts and circumstances and why?

In these terms, for instance, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, in their recently revised and currently influential work, explain this process in terms of levels of intensity of Western linkage and leverage, of external and domestic democratizing pressure related to favourable/unfavourable domestic conditions for democracy (2010, p. 236-308; 2020).

In all those analytical characterizations, the major agency lies on external political-economic forces and influences.

However, as we saw in the previous section, such dynamics have not been a merely defensive and desperate survival process, as those theoretical characterizations would imply. The adoption of liberal democratic characteristics (although several of them were imposed from the exterior within conditionality politics as we saw), has been successfully selective, while distorting, subverting, taming, domesticating and subordinating them to the existing working system, in order to make it more efficient and effective in its purpose

and *modus operandi* – to serve the private misappropriation of public funds, pursuing political legitimization through patronage networks, sustaining elites' hold on power, their reproduction and the maintenance of the *status quo*. This happening despite the permanence or replacement of specific leaders within the same traditional-historical elites in power, as in Mozambique or Angola.

This has been a process of transformation of neopatrimonial roots that led these systems into an upgraded – internationalized – dimension, moving one more step ahead with the the most recent wave of international authoritarian populism as exposed in the next chapter.

### III - The arrival of the new international wave of authoritarian populism in Angola and Mozambique

Meanwhile, after the 2008 financial crisis, the global context changed significantly. Overtly proud 'illiberal' proposals rose in Europe and elsewhere, the most cited example being the 2014 speech of Hungary's prime minister Victor Orbán, referring to the economic success of non-liberal democracies such as China, Russia and Turkey (ORBAN, 2014). By then, the rise of a new wave of authoritarian populism in Europe and elsewhere, not only in countries without a liberal tradition but also in long-established Western liberal democracies (NORRIS; INGLEHART, 2019), shattered the 1990s 'liberal consensus'.

For the previously expounded analytical perspective of liberal-democracy model (still implicitly anchored on the modern developmental State and the transitology paradigm as referred), this meant the loss of strength of the Western leverage, diminishing its interest in promoting world-wide democracy given the financial and political crisis. Added to this, the emergence of global alternative sources of military, economic, and diplomatic support – mainly China and Russia –, significantly reduced the external cost of authoritarianism. This led to the spread of new competitive authoritarianism, structurally grounded on populism and elections through several distortions on liberal democracy and electoral integrity, tilting the political playing field (LEVITSKY; WAY, 2020). According to these authors and most recent version of the liberal-democracy perspective, in much of sub-Saharan Africa, the State and party weakness facilitated the implementation or persistence of competitive authoritarianism instead of dictatorship, meaning that “state weakness has inhibited authoritarian consolidation in the post–post–Cold War era” (2020, p. 59).

In simple terms, the persistence or recrudescence of competitive authoritarianism is again explained through the back and forward dynamics of major 'external' international political waves. These systems would stick to competitive authoritarianism instead of going back to straightforward dictatorial hegemony because they do not have much alternative due to their weak effectiveness as States (LEVITSKY; WAY, 2020, p. 57-58).

Again, there is no explanation why the previous liberal-democratic penetration left no other durable or significant structural traits, marks or seeds whatsoever, besides tilted electoral processes.

Could it be, as argued in this paper, that it was because of a system in place, strong enough to rebuff the liberal-democratic features that effectively threatened it, while adopting or distorting the others that did not?

In sequence with our argument, such analyses lack a view from inside, according to the existing political systems' own dynamics and agency, in terms of its strategy to relate to the new international context on how best to serve its own purposes. In these terms, how the re/emergence of global and assumedly proud authoritarian/autocratic powers (that are mainly China and Russia for these countries) articulated within the existing political systems of a neopatrimonial root in sub-Saharan Africa, such as Angolan and Mozambique?

Seen from the perspective of those two major international stakeholders in the continent, the picture is clear. Russia is attempting to recover its status as a major geo-strategic player in the continent, trying to re-build on ties from Soviet times, assuming Africa as one of its foreign economic policy priorities, formalized at the Russia-Africa summit at Sochi in October 2019. The country is already the biggest arms supplier in the continent with increasing military cooperation agreements since 2015, and economic interests ranging from natural resources to energy, including nuclear (PUTIN, 2019; BBC, 2020; SCHMITT; GIBBONS-NEFF, 2020). Concomitantly, China assumed since the early 2000s as a major player in Africa, being currently the continent's biggest trading partner, dominating the business of infrastructure development, with its encompassing strategy (the Belt and Road Initiative) and also increasing its share on arms exports to the continent (13% in 2020). Moreover, it started defying traditional Western institutions as the WB and the IMF, by lending and cooperating on competitive financial terms, without the usual Western liberal-democratic conditions attached (DOLLAR, 2019; HORNE *et al*, 2019; LI, 2017).

Seen from the perspective of the existing political systems, again Mozambique and Angola are good examples on how such dynamics have been selectively adapted to inner logics and structures, especially in terms of the appeal presented by the supposed new international legitimization of reformulated authoritarian illiberalism.

In Mozambique, Chinese loans became central to help absorb the financial and political impact of the disclosed debt scandal. Although started in an earlier period, Chinese loans accelerated since the donors suspended financial assistance in 2016, after the scandal was revealed. The renewed importance of the country to China's Belt and Road Initiative has provided the government with a raft of preferential loans and direct investment from Chinese State and private companies. Mozambique debt towards China steadily increased from \$50 million in 2007 to \$2.4 billion in 2018, representing 20.2% of the total foreign debt of the country and 13.2% of the GDP in 2019, currently being the biggest bi-lateral creditor



and the main beneficiary of the debt service (BRAUTIGAM *et al*, 2020). Independent organizations complaint on the lack of transparency on these loans that remain unclarified in national budget documents, tracing parallels with the obscurity of the hidden debt scandal (HARNACK *et al*, 2020). According to the Centre of Public Integrity of Mozambique,

It is important to mention that the increase of 10% in the stock of foreign debt in 2017 was associated with a greater increase in bilateral debt (USD 473 million) than multilateral debt (USD 388.5 million) that year. The increase in the bilateral debt with China was about USD 300 million. China is a player that has emerged as a debt alternative, since the terms of contracting its debt do not follow the rigour demanded by the multilateral creditors. Hence, one may deduce that the hidden debts contributed to China becoming Mozambique's largest bilateral creditor (37% of the stock of bilateral foreign debt in 2019) (CIP, 2021).

As for Russia, the close relationship of the Soviet era slowed down in the 1990s, but regained strength in the last years, with Russia positioning itself to a stake at the increasingly important Mozambique gas sector. The new projects for exploitation of massive offshore natural gas deposits in Cabo Delgado are among Africa's three largest projects. Although the President of Mozambique was not at Sochi, as the summit coincided with Mozambique elections, he visited Russia a couple of months earlier, to a Russian-Mozambican business forum, to sign several business agreements in the areas of energy, oil and gas, politically and economically signalling the country's alignment.

The mounting Western fear on Chinese ambitions (and now including Russian) towards the continent and the increased importance of Mozambique's offshore natural gas deposits, were all wisely played-out by the Mozambican government to face Western external pressures on transparency, accountability, liberal rights and freedoms. The government became regularly touting this bilateral cooperation, praising Chinese posture, aid, and investment (BAKER, 2019), which certainly led Western donors to quickly understand that their traditional leverage had been significantly reduced or playing the other way-round.

The case of Angola is even clearer on such dynamics. Having to cope with a major reconstruction plan after 27-years of civil war that ended in 2002, the government sought for funding through an international donors' conference, including the IMF and the WB, which immediately associated several conditions in terms of transparency, accountability and human rights. Faced with such conditionality, the government found a way-out in 2003/2004, with China willing to fund the country's reconstruction with oil-backed loans, free from any such conditionalities and with better financial conditions than the IMF. With the new partnership and the oil revenues, the government felt sufficiently comfortable by 2004 to simply give up on the donors' conference (VIDAL, 2011).

Chinese loans substantially increased and Angola became the top recipient of Chinese loans in Africa with a total of more than \$43.2 billion from 2002 to 2018 (of a total of \$145.562 billion of Chinese loans in Africa for the same period), with a peak reached in 2016 with \$19.3 billion, prior to 2017 elections. Of the \$43.2 billion, \$10 billion were simply to recapitalize Sonangol (BRAUTIGAM *et al*, 2020), the oil company at the center of the previously referred looting schemes and scandals, the so-called State within the State.

The Chinese connection went beyond, and when the newly elected Angolan President João Lourenço rose to power in 2017, he assumed that he would rather be seen as Angola's Deng Xiao Ping than Angola's Michael Gorbachev, in evidence of the authoritarian references permeating his reform (EFE, 2017).

As in the case of FRELIMO, a close relationship of the MPLA with Russia goes back to Soviet times with a peak in the 1970s and 1980s during the civil war, regaining impetus in 2015. Since then, Angola has become the third-biggest African client for Russian arms (DEUTSCHE WELLE, 2020). Russia has also been increasing its long-time presence in the mining and energy sectors and Angola was among the group of countries visited by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in March 2018, in the run-up for the Sochi summit. By then, according to the minister, “our African friends note the need for Russia's active presence in the region, and more frequently express interest in holding a Russia-African summit.” (KLOMEGAH, 2020, p. 27).

In fact, the Angolan and Mozambican political systems quickly perceived the opportunities opened by the new international trend of assumedly proud (self-legitimized) authoritarian populism, especially in its most explicit forms of former allies or partners such as Russia and China, the ones that had always – historically – proved strong enough to be a counter-weight to the West. The new political legitimating discourses could help escape not only the decades-long Western pressures for liberalization, but also to fiercely/legitimately repel growing domestic demands and activism for democratization.

The attraction does not seem to be the adoption of a new model of authoritarianism, replacing a neopatrimonial matrix with a Chinese-type of totalitarianism or some form of Russian autocracy. First of all because that would hardly be feasible, if possible at all. Russian and Chinese regimes are based upon strong hierarchical bureaucracies and well-organized/disciplined parties. As referred, neopatrimonial-rooted African political systems are historically entrenched in different socio-cultural and economic contexts with different dynamics of party and State (weak) functioning and political management, pervaded with informality and patron-client legitimacy networks that obstacle proper institutionalization (infra-institutionalization). Secondly, the attraction for such ‘new’ discourses/models of authoritarian illiberalism is in no way ideological either, insofar as those illiberal experiments and discourses can be as distant as between the announced Xi Jinping's “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and Victor Órban's Christian Illiberal Democracy (PLATTNER, 2019).

The attraction is for the international legitimization of several authoritarian methods that might make these regimes more effective and efficient. In general terms, this means, for instance, the openly assumed limitation of individuals and minorities' fundamental rights and freedoms in the name of a higher common-good or project; to protect core values as supposedly sustained by the leadership and supposedly supported by the majority of the population, as implicitly expressed in also supposedly 'free and fair' elections (in fact tilted as referred).

More specifically, it includes the possibility to legally, openly and legitimately constrain/repress fundamental rights and freedoms and unashamedly feel free to smash public reaction whenever emerges, as in China and Russia; to increase State control over citizens through new technological means without fearing public reaction, that can be legitimately and freely smashed; to constitutionally revoke the limits for the leaders' term mandates, as the case of Putin and Xi Jinping; to openly and unashamedly limit the independence of the judiciary and the media, as the case in Russia, Hungary and Turkey; to improve political control over the economy and over the rising fortunes that emerged politically protected and authorized, as in Russia and China. In other words, to continue the tilting of the playing field, with more means and a new legitimizing international discourse, contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing system, ruling elites and *status quo*.

In short, it is the possibility to legitimize several of the procedures and mechanisms that neopatrimonial-rooted political systems have been camouflaging under democratic façade institutions since the 1990s.

In Mozambique and Angola (and possibly other countries in the region as well), this would represent another reinforcement of the existing system and not merely the possible and desperate survival for authoritarian weak States whatsoever.

## Conclusion

From the resilience shown in the analysed cases, it would be totally misleading and patronizing to consider neopatrimonial-rooted southern African regimes of the first generation (be it officially labelled Socialist or Capitalist) as poor or rough local versions of its Western or Eastern counterparts or African versions on its own (e.g. the so-called African Socialism of Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré and Julius Nyerere, or the so-called African capitalism of Mobutu's Zairianization and of Gowon government's Nigerianization). Likewise, it would also be reductionist and illusory to consider African political systems of the second generation (so-called transition) as faulty versions of liberal democracies, or local adaptations into some kind of tropical democracies.

As most detailed in this work, the same argument goes to the current transformations of these political systems through the interaction with the new wave of international

authoritarian populism of the 2010s, that are not aiming to replicate the dominant role-models that are more proudly authoritarian and illiberal with less legal constraints – Russia or China.

A long-track record of political analysis has been resisting to accept interpretations based on the ability of post-colonial African political systems to follow their own dynamics, according to its own historical ‘home-grown’ parcourse and experience, and according to its elites’ agency, ability and political competence to coherently pursue its own goals and objectives, as evolved since independence. That posture objectively results in the refusal to accept that these regimes can be anything more than allies, followers, victims, or secondary participants of major foreign international dominant dynamics and political models.

Such objection seems to be somehow implicitly related to the still surviving modern developmental political and ethical prejudice. In other words, it means that once acknowledged the specific and autonomous dynamics of those systems, one could hardly argue for their validity according to modern developmental political ethics and would certainly question all the efforts made over the years to influence such systems, shattering the still and always present implicit Liberal-democratic or Socialist teleology and its exclusive narratives influencing international policies towards Southern-Africa.

Nonetheless, besides any such judgements of value, these systems in its myriad variations and specific dynamics since independence, in articulation with the ‘world economy’ and main international political trends in all its developments and historical variations, have proven incredibly resilient, as most clearly shown by the cases of Mozambique and Angola exposed here.

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