

Swapo forever? Prospect for liberal democracy or prolonged one-party dominance in Namibia

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Abstract

Like most other National Liberation Movements (NLM), the Namibian South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) was transformed after independence and went on to become Swapo party (Swapo) and take power in 1990. Since then, Swapo has ruled Namibia with its support growing and its position as dominant party unchallenged. Following on from Roger Southall's prediction of the slow death of liberation movements, this article investigates whether SWAPO as a movement is dying and, if so, what this means for Swapo. Will Namibia soon take the road towards a more liberal democracy or will Swapo continue to dominate? Recurring to the literature on dominant party systems and competitive authoritarianism and based on expert interviews, the article finds Swapo's dominance to be Janus-faced: On the one hand, its electoral dominance and consequently its control of state resources is ensuring its further dominance. On the other hand, its clientelistic use of its power is alienating growing sections of society, especially the younger generation, and is contributing to its slow death as an NLM and dominant party.

Introduction

As was the case with most other National Liberation Movements (NLM) in their respective countries, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), which was transformed into Swapo Party (Swapo) in 1989, has dominated domestic politics in Namibia since independence.¹ On the occasion of the last national and presidential elections in 2014 it won stunning 80% of the total votes. This result was the highest election result Swapo has ever achieved and clearly illustrates its hegemony within the political system. Due to the pressing dominance of the leading party during the last

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¹ In the following I will use the spelling SWAPO in capital letters to indicate the liberation movement while the spelling Swapo indicates the Swapo Party evolving from the liberation movement during the transition.

decades, Namibian politics have often been classified as a dominant party system² or as competitive authoritarianism.³ However, according to Southall, the ‘death’ of Liberation Movements as harbingers of hope might lead to authoritarianism, but could just as easily pave the way for changes towards a less dominant system.⁴ One example for such a development is the SWAPO’s ‘big brother’, the African National Congress (ANC), which fell to its lowest level of voter support since 1994 after the constant scandals dogging its president Jacob Zuma, opened up space for political opposition.

This article examines the current challenges facing Swapo as a dominant party and the prospects for a more pluralistic political system in Namibia. It argues that current developments point to a possible liberalisation of the political system – despite Swapo’s dominance. Firstly, the heroes of the liberation struggle are reaching retirement age and with them Swapo is losing its struggle credentials. Secondly, the intensive self-entitlement, the old guard’s lack of accountability and poor level of service delivery have led to a conflict of generations.⁵ This conflict is threatening Swapo’s ability to mobilise the generation of so called ‘born frees’, or, as Southall puts it – Swapo as an NLM is slowly dying. Younger Namibians seem increasingly unwilling to accept the old tunes of the liberation war as an excuse for corruption and clientelism and demand a more accountable and inclusive government. As a consequence, the government is increasingly coming under fire from opposition groups such as the Affirmative Repositioning (AR) and the Landless Movement, which demand solutions to urgent social problems involving, for example, housing and land. The violent escalation of protests in 2016 is a sign of the seriousness of the conflict between the government and sections of the population. Thirdly, Swapo seems to be riven by internal power struggles between the old elites on the one hand and sections of the youth around Job Amupanda on the other. With current president Geingob in the middle of and increasingly attacked by both sides, the situation is threatening party cohesion in the future.

To provide theoretical guidance, this article reviews and combines literature on dominant parties and competitive authoritarianism and, starting from these findings, analyses the potential for a possible end of Swapo’s electoral dominance and a move towards a more competitive political system. The empirical analysis is based on expert interviews with political elites and civil society members, conducted during field research in 2016, as well as document analyses of newspaper articles and social media posts.

² Matthijs Bogaards, “Counting parties and identifying dominant party systems in Africa”, *European Journal of Political Research*, 43, 2004: 173-197; Lise Rakner and Lars Svåsand, “From dominant to competitive party system: The Zambian experience 1991–2001”, *Party Politics*, 10 (1), 2004: 49-68.

³ Henning Melber “Post-liberation democratic authoritarianism: the case of Namibia”, *Politikon. South African Journal of Political Studies*, 42 (1), 2015: 45-66; Henning Melber, Daniela Kromfrey and Martin Welz, “Changing of the guard? An anatomy of power within SWAPO of Namibia”, *African Affairs*, 116 (463), 2017: 284-310.

⁴ Roger Southall, *Liberation Movements in Power. Party & State in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013.

⁵ Markus Bayer and Andrea Pabst, “Heroes and victims: economies of entitlement after violent pasts”, *Peacebuilding*, 2017: 1-16, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2017.1303868>>.

The paper proceeds as follows: the first section discusses the phenomenon of so-called NLMs in office and Southall's prediction of the 'slow death' of NLMs to contextualise the case of Swapo in Namibia. The second section reviews two important theoretical debates, namely dominant party systems and competitive authoritarianism, to derive indicators for the analysis of the current Namibian system. This is followed by a brief genesis of Swapo's dominance and a detailed analysis of different stabilising and altering factors within the current political system. In a last step, the results are discussed, thereby fathoming the prospects for democratisation or persistent dominant party rule in Namibia.

The slow death of liberation movements: from harbinger of hope to dominant parties

In 1996, only two years after the ANC took power in South Africa, Wallerstein commented that this "may mark the end of a world-systemic process", i.e. that of "national liberation movements".⁶ In Africa, the capture of power by NLMs like the ANC in South Africa, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe or the SWAPO in Namibia in the course of the so-called third wave of democratisation was at first a source of great hope.⁷ These movements claimed to represent "the new nation" and were hailed as "harbinger of hope and freedom".⁸ The main hope was that they would be able to bring about genuine people's democracies and not 'only' mere liberal democracies. In reality, however, they "normally gave rise to single-party systems rather than pluralist democracies".⁹ The new emerging field of political 'transitology' labelled these regimes dominant party systems. Most authors assumed that the status of a dominant party would be temporary and that these regimes would develop either in the direction of liberal democracies or more authoritarian regimes. According to O'Donnell, the "installation of a democratically elected government facilitates a 'second transition'", meaning the passage from "a democratically-elected government to a democratic regime" or "to an institutionalized, consolidated democracy".¹⁰ However, this 'second transition' to a more pluralistic democratic system has often failed to take place. For sub-Saharan Africa, Van de Walle concluded at the beginning of the new millennium that most parties which had won the founding elections were still in power.¹¹ Typically, the

⁶ Immanuel Wallerstein, "The ANC and South Africa: Past and future of liberation movements in world-system", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (39), 1996: 2695-2699 (2695).

⁷ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman, OK, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

⁸ Hermann Giliomee, "South Africa's emerging dominant-party regime", *Journal of Democracy*, 9 (4), 1998: 128-141 (129); Southall, *Liberation Movements*: 327.

⁹ Roger Southall, "The South African elections of 1994: the remaking of a dominant party state", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32 (4), 1994: 629-655 (653).

¹⁰ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative democracy", *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (1), 1994: 55-69 (56).

¹¹ Nicolas Van de Walle, "Presidentialism and clientism in Africa's emerging party systems", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41, 2003: 297-322.

emerging party system consisted of a dominant party and a number of smaller and unstable parties. As a consequence, academics argued that these regimes should be understood as hybrid regimes, that is, an own regime-type that has to be distinguished from liberal or representative democracies on the one hand and authoritarian regimes on the other. In 2002, Carothers claimed that the so-called 'transition paradigm' had "outlived its usefulness".¹² Similarly, Southall concluded that the hope that NLMs in power would establish true democracies was largely betrayed:

[W]hereas they had projected unity, they had been at times bitterly divided; they had proclaimed human rights, but had been guilty of terror and atrocities; they incorporated women, yet were overwhelmingly patriarchal; and while declaring themselves democratic, they were in many of their practices deeply authoritarian [...].¹³

This scepticism concerning further democratic consolidation was reflected in academia by the turn towards hybrid regimes, competitive authoritarianism or delegative democracies.¹⁴ However, despite the various attempts to categorise these regimes, the question as to how they will develop in the future remains open.¹⁵ Southall, for example, claims that organizationally NLMs will survive in one way or another. This, however, allows for many political options, among them prospects for a more liberal democracy based on political competition. As the recent examples of uprisings during the so-called Arab Spring have shown, erosion of political legitimacy can occur rapidly and unexpectedly.

¹² Thomas Carothers, "The end of the transition paradigm", *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (1), 2002: 5-21 (6).

¹³ Southall, *Liberation Movements*: 327. In search of an explanation, Southall is referring to Frantz Fanon who sees a new national bourgeoisie taking power in the wake of the national independencies. Lacking economic power and intellectual resources, this new bourgeoisie transforms the liberation movements into party-machines and engages in scandalous enrichment.

¹⁴ Larry Jay Diamond, "Thinking about hybrid regimes", *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2), 2002: 21-35; Terry Lynn Karl, "The hybrid regimes of Central America", *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 1995: 72-86; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The rise of competitive authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (2), 2002: 51-65; eadem, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; O'Donnell, "Democracy". This debate led to a massive increase of new and diverse theoretical concepts. Fareed Zakaria coined the term "illiberal democracies", Diamond, Linz and Lipset spoke of "semi democracies" and Merkel of "defective democracy" (Fareed Zakaria, "The rise of illiberal democracy", *Foreign Affairs*, 76 (6), 1997: 22-43; Larry Diamond, Juan J. Linz and Seymour Martin Lipset, *Democracy in Developing Countries*, Boulder, Rienner, 1989; Wolfgang Merkel, "Embedded and defective democracies", *Democratization*, 11 (5), 2004: 33-58). To counter this proliferation of concepts, Collier and Levitsky already stated in 1997 that "if research on democratization degenerates into a competition to see who can come up with the next famous concept, the comparative study of regimes will be in serious trouble", cf. David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with adjectives. Conceptual innovations in comparative research", *World Politics*, 49, 1997: 430-451 (446).

¹⁵ Some authors even point out possible positive factors for democratic consolidation induced by dominant parties. Arian and Barnes and Pempel argue that dominant party-systems, in contrast to fragmented systems, are better suited to support the consolidation of democratic institutions (Alan Arian and Samuel H. Barnes, "The dominant party system: A neglected model of democratic stability", *The Journal of Politics*, 36 (3), 1974: 592-614; T. J. Pempel, *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990).

Dominant party rule and competitive authoritarianism

The term 'dominant party' generally refers to a party which establishes electoral dominance for a prolonged time, and enjoys dominance in the formation of government and in determining the public agenda.¹⁶ More specific definitions mostly vary in setting different thresholds for dominance, the inclusion or exclusion of opposition features, and the time-span taken into account.¹⁷ Van de Walle and Butler analyse illiberal democracies in Africa and distinguish between 'one-party dominant systems' and 'fragmented systems'. According to their definition, a party is classified as dominant if it wins at least 60% of the votes.¹⁸ Sartori uses a more sophisticated concept to describe different African polities, distinguishing between 'dominant authoritarian', 'dominant', 'non-dominant' and 'pulverised' party-systems.¹⁹ As outlined above, the scepticism about the democratic potential of some regimes 'in transition' spurred research on hybrid regimes. In this regard, Levitsky and Way introduced the term competitive authoritarianism to describe regimes in which

formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority", but incumbents "violate those rules so often and to such an extent [...] [t]hat the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards of democracy."²⁰

The regimes in power are likely to use bribery and the tax authority to co-opt or compliant judiciary to "legally harass" upcoming opposition and to "stack the cards in their favour". The phenomenon is closely linked to presidentialism – or regimes and situations which are dominated by the president. As a rule of thumb, Levitsky and Way regard regimes in which the president is re-elected with more than 70% of the votes as 'noncompetitive' and therefore as clear cases of authoritarianism.²¹ As a consequence, such regimes tend to be very persistent. However, even if these regimes try to upset the balance in the field of political competition, they are not immune against political contestation. More concretely, Levitsky and Way identify four arenas – electoral, legislative, judicial, and the media – in which such regimes can be challenged.²²

¹⁶ Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, "The dominant party regimes of South Africa, Mexico, Taiwan and Malaysia: A comparative assessment", in: eadem, (eds.), *The Awkward Embrace. One Party Domination and Democracy*, Amsterdam, Harwood, 1999: 1-46.

¹⁷ Bogaards, "Parties": 174f.

¹⁸ Nicolas Van de Walle and Kimberly Smiddy Butler, "Political parties and party systems in Africa's illiberal democracies", *Cambridge Review of International Studies*, 13 (1), 1999: 14-28.

¹⁹ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976: 260. Systems in which there is a balance of power between a few parties are described as non-dominant, whereas systems in which one party won an absolute majority in three or more consecutive elections are described as dominant. Furthermore, systems without party competition on an equal basis are called dominant authoritarian, and systems with a high number of weak parties are defined as pulverised.

²⁰ Levitsky and Way, "Rise": 52.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 55. In these cases Levitsky and Way consider the death or violent overthrow of the president as more likely as his or her electoral defeat.

²² Levitsky and Way, "Rise"; eadem, *Authoritarianism*.

The following review summarises the findings of literature from both theoretical fields in order to identify factors which influence the trajectory of democratisation. The main factors are internal cohesion, material resources and international support.

Internal cohesion

According to Dahl's minimal definition, a democracy is characterised by the existence of inclusive suffrage, free and fair elections to determine officials, and civil liberties such as the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information and associational autonomy.²³ Both strands of literature under review are bound to this definition: they perceive one-party domination as a special phenomenon in 'de facto' democratic regimes or understand it as a 'de jure' prevailing type of governance, which, however, is 'de facto' undermined and therefore nullified by the incumbents. However, in both cases internal (party or national) cohesion represents a decisive factor for one-party dominance and competitive authoritarianism.

One important element for internal party cohesion is corporatism. Different studies of transitioning democracies showed that it was the absence of a strong corporatist system to foster economic development, the emergence of a middle class and, eventually, serious political opposition (e.g. Taiwan) or, on the contrary, that it was the existence of a corporatist consensus between business and organised labour that stabilised party domination (e.g. Mexico).²⁴ Importantly, Gyimah-Boadi points out that the strength and cohesion of dominant parties also always reflects the weakness of counter-powers and challengers.²⁵ Gyimah-Boadi argues that in African democracies, most civil society organisations and/or political opposition are/is too weak to hold their governments accountable. Additionally, the factor ethnicity can also play an important role in providing necessary internal cohesion and in countering the "middle class effect".²⁶

A third factor for strong party cohesion can be found in the historical roots of a party. In this sense Huntington states that strength and durability of a party "derives more from its origin than from its character".²⁷ This concurs with Lyons' argument that the organisational structure of armed movements produces leadership coherence, discipline, and hierarchies which are conducive to strong party cohesion later.²⁸ Levitsky and Way came to a similar conclusion, stating that the cohesion of dominant parties can be rooted in

²³ Robert Alan Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989: 222.

²⁴ Giliomee, "Dominant-party regime": 135.

²⁵ E. Gyimah-Boadi, "Civil society in Africa", in: Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Yun-han Chu and Hung-mao Tien, (eds.), *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies*, Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997: 278-92.

²⁶ Hermann Giliomee and Charles Simkins, (eds.), *The Awkward Embrace: One Party Dominance and Democracy*, Amsterdam, Harwood, 1999.

²⁷ Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968: 424.

²⁸ Terrence Lyons, "From victorious rebels to strong authoritarian parties: prospects for post-war democratization", *Democratization*, 23 (6), 2016: 1026-1041 (1027).

“solidarity ties forged in a context of violent struggle such as war, revolution, or liberation movements”.²⁹ In this sense a transition to democracy in societies with a historical background of an armed liberation struggle “requires the break-up of that movement into a variety of organisations, representing the different interests and conflicts of a real country rather than of an idealised 'oppressed nation'”.³⁰ Not surprisingly, it is especially parties emerging from NLMs and armed struggle that often transform into dominant parties.

Therefore, cohesion plays a double role in the measurement of the organisational power of a competitive authoritarian regime. Firstly, a recent history of military conflicts such as successful revolutions or anti-colonial struggles can provide non-material sources of cohesion for officials if they are drawn from the generation which participated in the conflict.³¹ Secondly, internal party cohesion can be bolstered if it achieved power via violent conflict.³² However, in a recent comparison between Namibia and South Africa, Cooper concluded that dominant party cohesion and dominance can be challenged when marginalised minority factions within the party feel confident of their mobilisation capacity.³³ Furthermore, if competitive authoritarianism is not backed by a strong majoritarian party in parliament, the legislative can become a critical arena to challenge the regime.³⁴

Material factors

Next to cohesion, most theories highlight the importance of the material basis of a dominant party or a competitive authoritarian regime since it represents the ability to uphold neo-patrimonial and clientelistic relationships. Greene, for example, identifies the ability to turn public resources into patronage goods as one central explanation for the persistence of dominant parties.³⁵ As long as these resources are concentrated in the hands of the dominant party, oppositional parties are condemned to remain niche parties. Similarly, Levitsky and Way assume that the ability to stack the cards in one's favour is closely linked to material factors.³⁶ However, once the political economy of dominance erodes, the way is open for a more competitive system. Likewise, dominance based on clientelism and corruption can also backfire and pave the way for political

²⁹ Levitsky and Way, *Authoritarianism*: 60f.

³⁰ Marina Ottaway, “Liberation movements and transition to democracy: The case of the ANC”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 29 (1), 1991: 61-82 (82).

³¹ Levitsky and Way, *Authoritarianism*: 376)

³² *Ibid.*: 377.

³³ Ian Cooper, “Dominant party cohesion in comparative perspective: evidence from South Africa and Namibia”, *Democratization*, 24 (1), 2016: 1-19.

³⁴ Levitsky and Way, “Rise”: 57.

³⁵ Kenneth F. Greene, *Why Dominant Parties Lose: Mexico's Democratization in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

³⁶ Levitsky and Way, *Authoritarianism* .

change. According to Solinger, “a very high and ultimately intolerable level of corruption” can turn into a threat to prolonged party dominance as it can lead to increasing dissatisfaction among the population.³⁷ If combined with charismatic oppositional leaders, both aspects may seriously challenge prolonged one-party domination.

International factors

Whereas party cohesion and economic resources are internal elements for party domination, there are also international factors such as globalisation which can indirectly affect party dominance. So far, these factors have mostly been neglected in the debate on dominant party systems since they have not been perceived as controllable factors of democracy promotion. Within the debate on competitive authoritarianism, Levitsky and Way, however, identify two international factors that can play a key role for the prolongation or the end of a competitive authoritarian regime: linkages (to the West) and leverage (of the West). While the former “serve[s] as a transmitter of international influence” and “has a powerful impact on actors’ interests, incentives, and capabilities”, the latter can be defined as “governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure”.³⁸

Namibia after independence: emergence of a dominant party system

Swapo’s dominance as a party is closely linked to its legacy as a liberation movement. SWAPO was founded in 1960 and transformed itself from a nationalistic movement “concerned with the internal political mobilisation” into an NLM “engaged in a military struggle against the regime” and performing “the function of a government in exile”.³⁹ With the recognition of the UN General Assembly “as the sole and authentic representative” in 1976, SWAPO gained an exclusive status which was later be converted into a political monopoly. With independence, SWAPO became the Swapo Party (Swapo) and secured 56% of the total votes in the constituent assembly. In 1989, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) became the main opposition party securing 28% of the votes. Since then, the main opposition parties’ shares of the votes have been in a steady decline while in every election since in 1994 Swapo has managed to win a two-thirds majority.

The first real threat to Swapo’s domination was the formation of the Congress of Democrats (CoD) – a breakaway party founded by former Swapo member Ben Ulenga in 1999. Political observers attested the CoD’s “potential to attract a meaningful number of frustrated Swapo followers” and a potential to challenge the two-thirds majority of

³⁷ Dorothy J. Solinger, “Ending one-party dominance: Korea, Taiwan, Mexico”, *Journal of Democracy*, 12 (1), 2001: 30-42 (31).

³⁸ Levitsky and Way, *Authoritarianism*: 44f.; 40.

³⁹ Peter K. Katjavivi, *The Rise of Nationalism in Namibia and its International Dimension*, Ph. D. Thesis, Oxford, St. Antony’s College, 1986: 262.

Swapo.⁴⁰ The campaign for the 1999 national and presidential election became an exercise in mudslinging. Acting President Nujoma and then Minister of Home Affairs Ekanjio labelled Ulenga a traitor and a spy, accused him of orchestrating “rebellious activities” against the ruling party, and denounced his collaboration with South Africa during the days of Apartheid.⁴¹ Furthermore, Hamutenya, then Minister of Trade and Industry, voiced the famous warning: ‘It’s cold outside Swapo’, meaning that everybody leaving Swapo will have to face the consequences of social and economic exclusion. The CoD’s performance at the polls was, however, well below the expectations of most observers, but it still became the strongest opposition party by earning 9.9% of the total votes. In any case, this did not weaken Swapo as the CoD gained its votes not from frustrated Swapo followers but largely from former DTA supporters.⁴²

The second threat to Swapo predominance was posed by another Swapo breakaway in 2007. This time, long-standing leading Swapo official Hamutenya left the party after losing out in the battle for the party’s presidential nomination to the later president Pohamba in May 2004.⁴³ Hamutenya formed the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) and stood against Swapo in the national and presidential elections, securing 11% of the votes for the RDP and becoming the main opposition party. But again, the opposition was not able to challenge Swapo’s two-thirds majority. In the 2014 elections, the DTA became the main opposition party again. This result was not due to the good performance of the DTA, but due to its status as the most promising alternative compared to the other oppositional parties. With a meagre 4.8%, the lowest share of votes ever for the main oppositional party, the DTA is currently the strongest oppositional party in the National Assembly. Since 2014, all in all nine oppositional parties share 19 seats while Swapo holds 77 seats. The status of the party system in Namibia is therefore often described as a “steady drift toward a one party-dominant political system” and the “consolidation of single party-dominant rule by the ruling party Swapo” leading to a “de facto one-party state”.⁴⁴

By van de Walle and Butler’s definition of party dominance Swapo gained dominance in 1994 by winning more than 60% of the vote.⁴⁵ According to Sartori’s more demanding

⁴⁰ Henning Melber, *Understanding Namibia. The Trials for Independence*, London, Hurst, 2014: 41.

⁴¹ Lesley Blaauw and Sydnes Letsholo, “Namibia”, in: Denis Kadima und Susan Booysen, (eds.), *Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa 1989–2009. 10 Years of Multiparty Democracy*, Johannesburg, Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 2009: 347-384 (371); Tangeni Amupadhi, “Namibia: Nujoma worried about new party”, *The Namibian*, 31 March, 1999, <<http://allafrica.com/stories/199903310142.html>> [accessed 11 June, 2017].

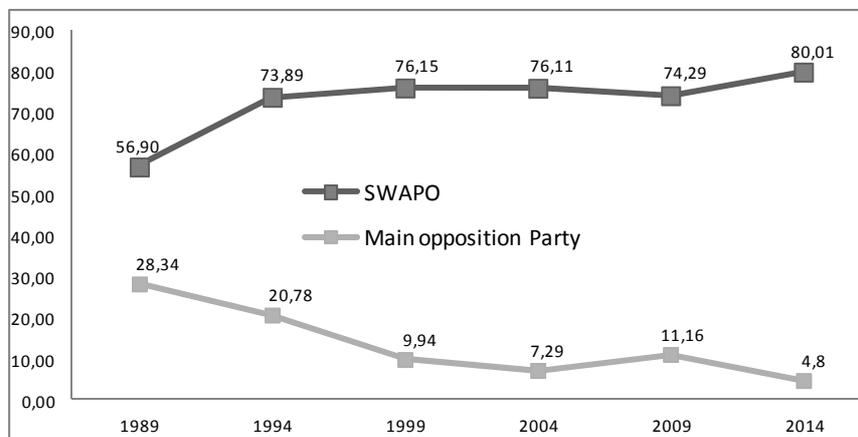
⁴² David Simon, “Namibian elections. SWAPO consolidates its hold on power”, *Review of African Political Economy*, 27 (83), 2000: 113-115 (114).

⁴³ Blaauw and Letsholo, “Namibia”: 352.

⁴⁴ Gretchen Bauer, “Namibia in the first decade of independence: how democratic”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 27 (1), 2001: 33-55 (42); Melber, *Namibia*: 38.

⁴⁵ Van de Walle and Butler, “Parties”.

Figure 1: Voters' shares in national and presidential elections (1989–2014)



Source: Own compilation based on Data of the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN)

definition, Namibia has become a dominant party system since the national elections in 1999.⁴⁶ However, the classification as a competitive authoritarian regime is far more complex. In their main publication on the topic, Levitsky and Way do not list Namibia as a case.⁴⁷ Furthermore, even if the electoral dominance of Swapo can be linked to the fact that ‘the cards are stacked in Swapo’s favour’, it is not true that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards of democracy. “Vote rigging or other manipulations seem not to have had any significant impact”, nor did political violence and repression occur.⁴⁸ In general, Namibia is labelled free with a media that enjoys a relatively open environment.⁴⁹ Moreover, although up to now every Namibian president has been elected with at least 76% of the votes,⁵⁰ Swapo has always proved willing to comply with the democratic procedures of succession, meaning that no president – except ‘founding father’ Nujoma – served more than two terms. This contradicts the tendencies of ‘presidentialisation’ observed in most competitive authoritarian regimes. On the contrary, however, one can argue that Swapo clearly makes widespread use of “public finances, employees, or infrastructure in a way that limits the opposition’s ability to

⁴⁶ Sartori, *Parties*.

⁴⁷ Levitsky and Way, *Authoritarianism*.

⁴⁸ Melber et al., “Changing”: 286.

⁴⁹ Freedom House, “Freedom in the world”, 2016, <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016>> [accessed 11 July, 2016]; Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press Index, 2016”, <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/namibia>> [accessed 11 July, 2016]; interview Gwen Lister, former Chief Editor of *The Namibian*, Windhoek, 07 March, 2016.

⁵⁰ Therefore, Namibia can clearly be classified as ‘noncompetitive’ system according to Levitsky and Way, “Rise”.

compete on reasonably equal footing” or it “uses public policy instruments in a discretionary way to skew access to private-sector finance”.⁵¹ This, in absence of all other indicators would make it a case on the margins – “If at all”.⁵²

Pillars of domination: stabilising factors of Swapo dominance

There are multiple reasons for the persistent electoral dominance of Swapo. However, most of them seem to be linked to its status as an NLM in office, that is, they seem to be grounded in Swapo’s past. This paragraph analyses Swapo and the status of Namibian democracy against the background of the identified factors of party dominance (internal cohesion, material basis and international influence).

Internal cohesion: the legacy of the liberation struggle

The armed struggle for independence left Namibia and Swapo with strong nationalism and party cohesion. Over the last 26 years, only two secessions from the mother-party occurred – and both represented only minor threats to Swapo’s dominance. Swapo was successful in presenting itself as the embodiment of the people and labelling and sidelining the oppositional forces as traitors. Furthermore, party-internal hierarchies are strict and sustained by personal loyalties and social control. Post-independence politics in Namibia have mainly been dominated by ex-SWAPO activists from the first and second generation, especially close friends of founding father Nujoma.⁵³ Generally, internal criticism is a very rare phenomenon since all Swapo members perceive themselves as comrades and deviation from the party line is often seen as betrayal. Additionally, the struggle for independence forged close ties between the party leadership and its followers. To illustrate the status of Swapo it is, for example, not uncommon in Namibia for Swapo to be compared with a church.⁵⁴

Due to its legacy as an NLM, Swapo also has historic links to the trade unions; an indicator which can be characterised as corporatist. Under South African occupation, the

⁵¹ Levitsky and Way, *Authoritarianism*: 368.

⁵² Melber et al., “Changing”: 286. For the Namibian context, the concept of competitive authoritarianism does not seem to provide substantial theoretical advantages compared to the concept of dominant parties. Thus, I will use the theoretical assumptions about possible challenges for these regimes for the analysis, but refer to problems of one-party dominance or hegemony instead of using the term competitive authoritarianism.

⁵³ Interview Ignatius Shiwaxmeni, Chairman of the All Peoples Party (APP), Windhoek, 2 March, 2016.

⁵⁴ Interview Kanaana Hishoono, Former presidential advisor of president Sam Nujoma, Windhoek, 25 February, 2016. During the latest 2015 regional council and local authorities’ elections, in total 26 constituencies remained uncontested and were won by Swapo candidates. Nearly all of them were situated in the North (Electoral Commission of Namibia, “Regional Councils Elections 2015 – Uncontested constituencies and local Authorities, 2015, <<http://www.ecn.na/uncontested-constituencies> > [accessed 28 September, 2016]. As stated earlier, none of the Swapo splinter-parties was ever able to win a majority in these constituencies.

labour movement subordinated their goals of internal development “for the final push” under the broader goal of independence.⁵⁵ Since SWAPO proclaimed a nationalistic and socialistic post-independence policy from the 1960s to the late 1980s, the trade unions and SWAPO movement were united in the goal of achieving independence and ideologically closely aligned. Although some attempts were made “to move the federation away from the ruling party” in the early years of independence, this alliance between the Labour Movement and Swapo still exists today, 27 years after independence.⁵⁶ The biggest Namibian union, the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW), for example, is still affiliated with the ruling party. This affiliation, blurring “the distinction between trade union and political party”, can be described as a special kind of corporatism as other non-affiliated unions like the Trade Unions Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) are permitted but side-lined by the government.⁵⁷ In using nationalist rhetoric, Swapo was able to uphold an ideology that binds NUNW to the party of liberation although it had adopted neo-liberal ‘realpolitik’ after independence. Cohesion is therefore ensured by traditional links and clientelistic structures rather than by a shared socialist ideology. Although Namibia is frequently complimented for its successful economic policy by the World Bank, the union members are “caught in a dilemma of loyalty to the ruling party [...] and dissatisfaction with the slow process of social change”.⁵⁸

On a broader basis, Namibians in general also seem to support their leading party. According to the 2014 Afrobarometer, 74% of the Namibians rate the current status of their country as ‘fairly’ or ‘very good’.⁵⁹ Swapo is mostly given the credit for this. As one can see in the following figure, the trust in the ruling party has increased steadily over recent years.

Another factor playing an important role for one-party dominance is identity and ethnicity. Namibian society is multi-ethnic and consists of 10 sub-groups with each having its own language. However, Namibians have generally developed a strong sense of nationalism over the last decades. From 2009 until the latest survey of Afrobarometer, the percentage of the population that perceived itself as solely Namibians (without any ethnic identity) rose from 24 to over 50%. Importantly, Swapo is not perceived as an ethnic party, even if the biggest ethnic group, the Ovambo, plays a crucial role within the history of SWAPO. They built the support base of the movement and the movement grew from the so-called Ovamboland People’s Organisation (OPO).

⁵⁵ Interview Ndumba Kamwanyah, Lecturer at the Department of Human Sciences-Social Work at the University of Namibia (UNAM), Windhoek, 15 November, 2015.

⁵⁶ Bauer, “Namibia”: 49.

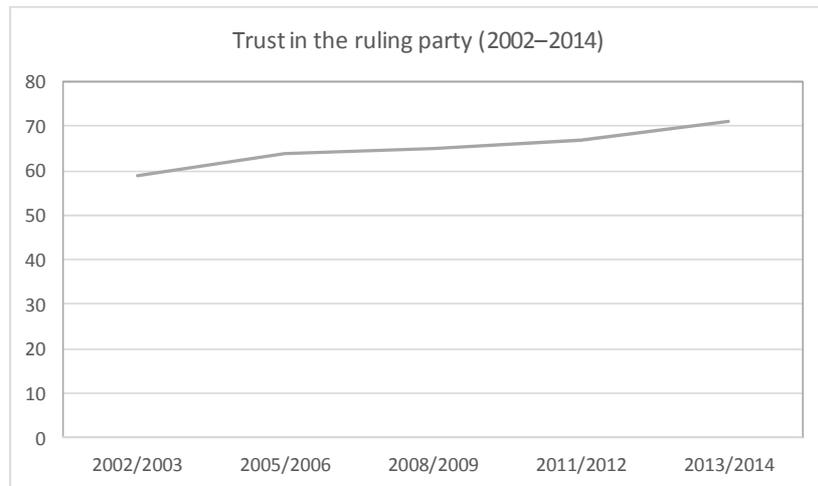
⁵⁷ Gretchen Bauer, *Labor and Democracy in Namibia: 1971–1996*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1998: 8.

⁵⁸ Herbert Jauch, “Trade Unions in Namibia: Defining a new role?”, 2004: 28, <<http://vivaworkers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Trade-Unions-in-Namibia-2004.pdf>> [accessed 11 July, 2016].

⁵⁹ Survey Warehouse, Summary of Results: Afrobarometer Round 6 Survey in Namibia, Windhoek, 2014, <<http://afrobarometer.org/publications/namibia-round-6-summary-results-2014>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

Thus, it was mainly the Ovambo in the North who bore the brunt of the liberation war. This, in turn, affected the attitude of many Ovambos. In contrast to the Afrikaans-speakers, they are mainly strong supporters of the new regime and of Swapo as the party who brought it.⁶⁰ Swapo is, however, more than an Ovambo party. This was clearly demonstrated when Geingob, a non-Ovambo, became president.

Figure 2: Trust in the ruling party 2002–2014



Source: Own compilation. Data provided by Afrobarometer.

Material factors

As outlined above, some studies on one party-dominance stress the ability to uphold clientelistic relationships as a cornerstone for their electoral dominance. The last 26 years in power have left Swapo in a favourable financial situation, enabling it to reward compliant behaviour such as party membership and support and to punish deviant behaviour. These sanctions or the menace of sanctions are reflected by the well-known saying that ‘it is cold outside Swapo’. Party funds in Namibia are allocated according to the Electoral Act of 2014. Therein, section 155b states that party funds are assigned “based on the principle of proportional representation as contained in Article 49 of the Namibian Constitution”. In contrast to the largest oppositional party, the DTA, which received N\$ 5.7 million in 2015, Swapo obtained N\$ 97 million for their 101 seats in

⁶⁰ Antonie Nord, *Die Legitimation der Demokratie in südlichen Afrika. Eine vergleichende Analyse politischer Einstellungen in Namibia und Botswana*, Münster, LIT, 2004: 125.

parliament.⁶¹ In addition to the 'per seat increase' provided by the Minister of Finance, Swapo profited most from the enlargement of the parliament introduced in 2014 with the third constitutional amendment bill.⁶² This bill increased the seats in the National Council from 26 to 42 and in the National Assembly from 72 to 96. Although all parties in the parliament profited from this enlargement, Swapo, still occupying most seats in both chambers, gained most in terms of finances.⁶³

Furthermore, Swapo was able to establish various close ties to the business community in Namibia, enabling it to allocate additional funds. Since Swapo controls government expenditure, good connections to the party are essential for government contracts, playing a huge role in the Namibian economy. As Max Weiland, research associate with the Institute for Public Policy Research, puts it: "Little country, little economy, big party".⁶⁴ In 2012, for example, the then-president Pohamba hosted an exclusive fundraising dinner to generate additional funds. Some 20 influential business people were offered a seat at the president's table for a donation of N\$ 100,000.⁶⁵ With these 'good relations' to the business community, Swapo funding is guaranteed.⁶⁶ This financial advantage over the oppositional parties cannot be underestimated. To put this in context: the estimated additional funds of approximately N\$ 2 million, allocated at this single event, exceed the total party funds of the Republican Party (RP), the South-West African National Union (SWANU) and United People's Movement (UPM) – all receiving in total N\$ 958,000 for the single seat they hold in the National Assembly – by the factor of two. However, these material advantages are a product of the electoral dominance and will disappear if it is challenged.

Beyond this, Swapo is also involved in business activities in Namibia. In 1989, the year of independence, Swapo formed Kalahari Holdings, its first own holding.⁶⁷ According to some commentators, since then Swapo has developed its own "capitalistic empire",

⁶¹ Staff Reporter, "Party funding balloons to N\$116 million", *The Namibian*, 29 April, 2015, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=136392&page=archive-read>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁶² Republic of Namibia, Namibian Constitution third Amendment Bill, 2014, <www.lac.org.na/Pdf/B9-2014-Nam-Constitution-3-Amend.pdf> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁶³ All representatives of oppositional parties identified problems of financing their party activities as a key problem (interview Reggie Diergardt, Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), Windhoek, 22 February, 2016; interview Ignatius Shiwaxmeni, Chariman of the All Peoples Party (APP), Windhoek, 2 March, 2016).

⁶⁴ Interview Max Weilandt, Research Associate, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 18 February, 2016.

⁶⁵ Melber, *Namibia*: 69.

⁶⁶ Immanuel Shinovene, "Opposition parties struggle with funding", *The Namibian*, 29 January, 2014, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?page=archive-read&id=119086>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁶⁷ Christof Malatsky, "Swapo's business empire: a profile", *The Namibian*, February 10, 2010, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=62662&page=archive-read>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

transforming itself into “Swapo (Pty) Ltd”.⁶⁸ Since business reports of these holdings and shares are infrequent, it is hard to assess the real assets of Swapo. The homepage of Kalahari Holdings provides no business reports but “prides itself in the ability to fund SWAPO Party activities and services throughout the country” for the general and presidential elections in 2014.⁶⁹

International factors: linkages and leverage

Namibia’s independence was a product of international negotiations. It was negotiated between the Western Contact Group (WCG) and South Africa on the one hand and Cuba on the other, without any direct involvement of SWAPO representatives. Furthermore, according to today’s President and then-Chairmen of the Constituent Assembly, Hage Geingob, “the important provisions of the constitution” were based on the constitutional principles proposed by the WCG and were “imposed on the Constituent Assembly” in order to ensure “that the liberation movement did not opt for socialism that might compromise the interests of the settlers”.⁷⁰ In this sense, international leverage set the preconditions for the internal settlement and predetermined the democratic outcome⁷¹ – an outcome “far more democratic [...] than might readily have been predicted from the movement’s own prior record”.⁷² Since then, Swapo has not deviated from the democratic path. The leverage of the West is high since Namibia neither possesses important raw materials nor is of strategic importance. Indeed, the country is highly dependent on international aid. In his Vision 2030 published in 2004, Sam Nujoma declared the goal “to promote the creation of a diversified, open market economy” in order to attract international investment.⁷³ This goal also reflects the importance of close ties to ‘the West’ for Namibia’s wellbeing. Although relations to the ‘historical allies’ Cuba, South Africa and North Korea are still close, they cannot substitute western leverage and reduce Namibia’s dependency. On the contrary, Swapo has always been careful not to risk any conflict that might endanger the flow of international aid. For example, the Namibian government has thus far avoided pressing claims against Germany for a

⁶⁸ Immanuel Shinovene and Tileni Mongudhi, “Swapo (Pty) Ltd: A troubled capitalist empire”, *The Namibian*, 11 December, 2015, <<http://namibian.com.na/dedi33.cpt4.host-h.net/index.php?page=archive-read&id=145340>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁶⁹ Kalahari Holdings, “SWAPO Party Funding”, <http://www.kalahariholdings.com/social-responsibility/swapo_funding/> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁷⁰ Hage G. Geingob, “Drafting of Namibia’s constitution”, in: Anton Bösl, Nico Horn and André du Pisani, (eds.), *Constitutional Democracy in Namibia. A Critical Analysis after two Decades*, Windhoek, Macmillan Education Namibia, 2010: 83-107 (85).

⁷¹ Lauren Dobell, *Swapo’s Struggle for Namibia, 1960–1991. War by Other Means*, 2nd ed., Basel, Schlettwein, 2000: 76ff.

⁷² Colin Leys and John S. Saul, “Liberation without democracy? The Swapo crisis of 1976”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20 (1), 1994: 123-147 (146).

⁷³ Government of the Republic of Namibia, “Vision 2030”, Windhoek, 2004, <http://www.wisis.unam.na/hivdocs/unicf/namibia/Vision%202030/NPC_2004_Vision%202030_policy%20of%20ramew_pg%2001-50.pdf> [accessed 11 June, 2017].

genocide reparation payment despite a campaign by significant sections of the Herero and Nama communities. Furthermore, the Namibian government has never tried to influence the work of international political foundations such as the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) and Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) even if they are exclusively working with oppositional parties. Thus, these international factors seem to speak against a move towards authoritarianism. However, they also do not speak clearly for democratisation since Swapo has never been officially accused of deviating from democratic procedures and no western power has ever pushed for deeper democratisation or a more competitive party system in Namibia.

The wind of change?

So far, most indicators speak for prolonged one-party domination in Namibia. However, some developments have begun to undermine these stabilising factors. Most of them are challenging internal party cohesion. In the following section, I will focus on three issues which indicate recent developments that might have the potential to weaken Swapo's dominance: the land question, the conflict of generations and Swapo's seesaw policy between reform and conservation of the status quo.⁷⁴

The land question: the death of Swapo's ideals

The access to land has always been a pressing problem in Namibia. However, after independence the land conference in 1991 only addressed the issue of commercial farm land and left out issues of urban housing. Since prices in larger cities and towns are constantly rising, affordable accommodation is nowadays a pressing problem, leading to informal settlements with poor living conditions. Namibia's stable annual increase in GDP of 5% over recent years camouflages one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world. An estimated 30% of the population of Windhoek is currently living in informal settlements, mostly in the former township of Katutura.⁷⁵ Based on the assessment of a "substantial imbalance between the demand for and the supply of land and housing units in Namibia", the three Swapo Youth League members Amupanda, Kambala and Nauyoma founded the AR movement in 2014 to address the problem.⁷⁶ They formulated the "right to access to adequate housing" and, to underline their claim, performed a

⁷⁴ As outlined above, the material factors are more or less linked to electoral dominance and will diminish with it since its main sources, the official budget support for political parties and its close links to the business community will diminish should the Swapo lose seats in parliament and consequently the control over government expenditure. In addition, there is no clear indication of a change in western linkages or leverage.

⁷⁵ Tjitemisa Kuzeeko, "30% of Windhoekers live in informal settlements", *New Era*, November 28, 2013, <www.newera.com.na/2013/11/28/30-windhoekers-live-informal-settlements/> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁷⁶ Affirmative Repositioning, "AR Housing Charter 31", 2015: 3, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/public/uploads/documents/55bb181cd9821/AR%20HOUSING%20CHARTER%2031a.pdf>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

symbolic act in occupying land at Windhoek Kleine Kuppe on 9 November 2014.⁷⁷ This led UNAM lecturer Kamwanyah to announce the “start of a new protesting youth generation”.⁷⁸ Since then, AR has developed into a hybrid between an internal party faction and a social movement. One year after the (symbolic) land occupation, however, AR seemed to run out of steam.⁷⁹ This changed in April 2016 when a spontaneous land grab in Walvis Bay escalated into violence.⁸⁰ Additionally, AR tried to move away from the single issue of land and widened its agenda, also covering issues of corruption and misuse of government resources. In 2016, for example, they started to mobilise against the plans to build an expensive government building, organized ‘AR universities’ to educate the people and lobbied against the destruction of illegally erected shacks. AR works closely with the so-called Landless Movement, which supports it in the more rural areas of the North. The recent destruction of illegal settlements by the Windhoek city authorities and the ensuing legal actions by AR lawyers led the acting Swapo Party Youth League secretary, Veikko Nekundi, to express his concerns that such acts by Swapo-controlled institutions “are oppressing the voting masses, as their actions are leading the majority of our people to hate the party, thereby weakening our party”.⁸¹ The land question is essential for Swapo and anything that tarnishes its reputation gained in the fight for liberation, which was essentially a struggle for the control of land and for the prospects of a better future, damages its legitimacy as an NLM. Moreover, the land question stands as a general symbol for the dissatisfaction with public service delivery. According to the 2014 Afrobarometer, 78% of the population agree that too much emphasis is placed on rewarding party loyalty at the expense of general service delivery. The above statement by Nekundi clearly shows that some Swapo officials, especially the younger ones without struggle credentials, are aware of a possible loss of legitimacy due to clientelism and mismanagement. AR and the Landless Movement, in contrast, are opening up so-called ‘invented space’ through popular mobilisation led ‘from below’.⁸² This represents a new form of mobilisation of civil society outside the

⁷⁷ Ibid.: 14.

⁷⁸ Interview Ndumba Kamwanyah, Lecturer at the Department of Human Sciences-Social Work at the University of Namibia (UNAM), Windhoek, 15 November, 2015.

⁷⁹ Interview Phaniel Kapaama, Lecturer for Political and Administrative Studies at the University of Namibia (UNAM), Windhoek, 09 March, 2016.

⁸⁰ Nampa, “Land invaders clash with cops at Walvis”, *The Namibian*, 04 April, 2016, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/Land-invaders-clash-with-cops-at-Walvis/39006/read>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁸¹ Ndanki Kahiurika, “Do not sabotage Swapo votes, says Nekundi”, *The Namibian*, 30 March, 2017, <<http://www.namibian.com.na/163014/archive-read/Do-not-sabotage-Swapo-votes-says-Nekundi>> [accessed 01 April, 2017].

⁸² To describe state-society relations, Cornwall differentiates between invited space “initiated by the local state” looking to draw “local communities into processes of consultation, deliberation and sometimes joint decision-making” and “invented space” claimed from below, (Andrea Cornwall, “Locating citizen participation”, *IDS Bulletin*, 33(2), 2002: 49-58 [55]). According to Miraftab (2004: 1) this invented space is claimed by the grassroots and their collective action and is “directly confronting the authorities and the

party framework and hitherto unknown in Namibia and challenges Swapo's image as the sole embodiment of the people and harbinger of hope. Furthermore, since the Landless Movement calls for "agrarian reform" and "for restorative justice", they address the sensitive issue of ancestral land.⁸³ Thereby, the land question has the potential to reignite old conflicts between the different Namibian ethnic groups, each mobilising for their particular agendas. As illustrated, AR is an interesting phenomenon since it represents a movement 'inventing' space for political contestation; it is, however, still linked to Swapo and can also be seen as party faction, representing a conflict of generations within the ruling party.

Conflict of generations

As outlined above by Ottaway, the democratic consolidation of an NLM in office requires a break-up of the movement into "a variety of organizations, representing the different interests and conflicts of a real country rather than of an idealised 'oppressed nation'".⁸⁴ To date, Namibia has been ruled in an authoritarian manner by big men, who derived their right to rule from their "struggle credentials".⁸⁵ Former president Pohamba's two cabinets, for example, consisted exclusively of former SWAPO activists. However, the big men with struggle credentials are reaching the retirement age so there have never been so few SWAPO activists in a cabinet as there are in Geingob's current cabinet.⁸⁶ According to Melber et al., this tendency is likely to prevail since the "generation of those 'born free' [...] feels less attached to former freedom fighters. Therefore, the old guard and its legitimacy based on former struggle credentials are on the decline."⁸⁷ However, the generation of the now 30–40 years old, which did not fight but grew up in exile or under oppression, acts as generational gatekeeper. Swapo Youth League spokesperson Neville Itope, for example, highlights the existing good cooperation between the older generation and the younger one.⁸⁸ However, beside or behind these gatekeepers, the conflict between the generation of freedom fighters and the so-called born frees – the generation born after independence – is growing.

With an average age of currently 22.8 years, the majority of Namibians never witnessed apartheid or the struggle for independence and are increasingly upset with the prevalent clientelism, corruption and entitlement of the older generation. Attacking the Swapo

status quo" (Farana Miraftab, "Invited and invented spaces of participation: Neoliberal citizenship and feminists' expanded notion of politics", *Wagadu*, 1, 2004: 1-7 [1]).

⁸³ New Era, "Just who are the Landless People's Movement?", *New Era*, 17.02.2017, <<https://www.newera.com.na/2017/02/17/just-who-are-the-landless-peoples-movement/>> [accessed 01 April, 2017].

⁸⁴ Ottaway, "Liberation Movements": 82.

⁸⁵ Melber et al., "Changing": 287.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 301. They nonetheless continue to hold three-quarter of all ministerial offices.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Interview Neville Itope, Spokesperson of the Swapo Party Youth League, Windhoek, 22 March, 2016.

leadership's "cheap politics created by poverty of ideas" and the "cheap propaganda of peace and stability"⁸⁹ and delivering the "clear message that youth will no longer eat bones in their country while even dogs of elites are eating better"⁹⁰, AR became the first harbinger of an inter-generation conflict between the 'freedom fighters' and the so-called 'born frees'. The trump of the old generation, the critique-silencing reproach 'where were you when we were fighting in the trenches?' is no longer silently accepted and furthermore not available to the gatekeepers within Swapo. Current Swapo Secretary General Mbumba explains the growing split between the party and the younger generation by pointing out that "this generation has not seen all this credit for Swapo leading the fight against colonialism against Apartheid against South Africa".⁹¹ In February this year, this conflict culminated with leading AR figure Amupanda announcing his intention to stand against current president Geingob during the Swapo internal nomination for the upcoming presidential elections. Amupanda thus expressed his unwillingness to accept "that only pensioners should run for president".⁹² Moreover, he declared his desire to put the balance of power to the test in claiming that he already had the support of 50% of politburo members, 60% support of the Swapo Party Women's Council and 40% of the elders' council.⁹³

However, the final assessment of the threat posed by AR outside and inside of Swapo is very complicated at this stage since we know little about its support base. On Facebook, AR currently has 110,000 followers, which is an enormous figure compared to the 30,000 followers of the Swapo Youth League (as of April 10, 2017). For the mass mobilisation against the new government building that was scheduled for 16 June 2016, AR expected 5,000 supporters, but only roughly 1,000 showed up. Even if this turnout was far less than expected, it was at the same time the largest manifestation of civil forces outside the Swapo framework in the post-independence era. What can be stated is that AR's support base seems to be extremely diverse, ranging from the well-educated urban bourgeoisie of Windhoek to landless and illiterate dwellers of the northern regions.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Job Shipululo Amupanda, "Rebutting falsehood of anti-AR Armchair critics", in: Nauyoma Dimbulukeni, George Kambala and Job Shipululo Amupanda, (eds.), *AR Foremost Perspectives. Towards Knowledge & Confidence of Self*, Windhoek, AR News and PPC Press, 2015: 11-13 (12).

⁹⁰ George Kambala, Nauyoma Dimbulukeni and Job Shipululo Amupanda (2015a), "Affirmative repositioning – A conceptual framework", in: Nauyoma Dimbulukeni, George Kambala and Job Shipululo Amupanda, (eds.), *AR Foremost Perspectives. Towards Knowledge & Confidence of Self*, Windhoek, AR News and PPC Press, 2015: 3-7 (6).

⁹¹ Interview Nangolo Mbumba, Secretary General of the Swapo Party, Windhoek, 10 March, 2016.

⁹² Sonja Angula-Smith, "Job eyes SWAPO presidency", *Windhoek Observer*, 10 February, 2017, <<http://www.observer.com.na/index.php/business/item/7639-job-eyes-swapo-presidency>> [accessed 01 April, 2017].

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Interview Max Weilandt, Research Associate, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Windhoek, 18 February, 2016; interview Naita Hishoona, Director of the Namibian Institute for Democracy (NID), Windhoek, 30 March, 2016.

Internal party frictions

According to Swapo party tradition, the party president is normally also Swapo's presidential candidate. The presidential candidate is typically nominated on the occasion of the party congress, which takes place every four years and two years in advance of the next national and presidential elections. As a result, the congress is traditionally the locus for rivalries, conflicts, and splits. In 1999, the CoD was founded after the party decided to grant the founding father a third term in office. Accordingly, Hidipo Hamutenya left to form the RDP after losing the internal nomination process against Pohamba during the 2004 congress. The succession problem, which normally occurred at the end of the second/third term of a Swapo presidency, arose after the first term in these cases and thereby indicated serious infighting.

According to political analyst Joseph Diescho, the current president Geingob will no longer be accepted as party president, thus making it unclear if he will stay at the helm of the party after the upcoming party congress at the end of the year.⁹⁵ Geingob is being challenged from two sides: The first challenge comes from the younger generation. Amupanda's declaration that he would stand against Geingob carried the conflict of generations into the party's own ranks. The second challenge comes from the old guard who wish to preserve the status quo and oppose Geingob's reforming position.

It seems that the Swapo leadership is well aware of the first problem and is trying to tackle it in different ways. The conservative wing of Swapo is trying to safeguard its own ideology with the establishment of a party-school in order to

produce Party cadres of high calibre who will be able to articulate the Party ideology and provide leadership to the broad membership of the Party. We want them to be groomed into serious leaders who will ensure the long-term survival of the Party.⁹⁶

The Swapo cadre school should, according to the current Secretary General of the Party Nangolo Mbumba, also help to "correct wayward members and contain the growing incidences of rebellion within its ranks".⁹⁷ In other words, the school is an attempt to preserve the ideology of the founding generation of Swapo and guarantee the status quo against the wind of change. In the sense of Melber et al., they are trying to 'produce' loyal gatekeepers.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ The Patriot, "Namibia's 2017 agenda", *The Patriot*, 20 January 20, 2017, <<http://thepatriot.com.na/index.php/2017/01/20/namibias-2017-agenda/>> [accessed 12 February, 2017].

⁹⁶ Asser Ntinda, "Party School coming soon – SWAPO wants cadres to be moulded into serious leaders", no date, <http://www.swapoparty.org/party_school_coming_soon.html> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁹⁷ Toivo Ndjebela, "Swapo approves module for party school", *Namibian Sun*, 07 August, 2013, <<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/swapo-approves-module-for-party-school>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

⁹⁸ Melber et al., "Changing".

More progressive elements within Swapo, on the contrary, are trying to balance the increasing diversity and to end the “culture of submission” which presents a “stumbling block” for Swapo’s final transformation from an NLM to a responsive democratic political party.⁹⁹ The case of the three AR leaders Amupanda, Kambala and Nauyoma is somehow exemplary of the two different approaches. All three activists were expelled by the Politburo after the land-grabbing at Kleine Kuppe. President Hage Geingob, however, announced that there should be talks with the expelled ex-Swapo Youth League leaders. This raises some questions, since the President is also a member of the Politburo. Geingob’s ‘inclusive’ strategy might be a typical case of the carrot and stick strategy; or it might indicate a deeper split between two different factions within Swapo and its Politburo. This, however, would mean that Geingob does not have the upper hand in the Politburo and is trying to appease the hardliners. As the former chief editor Gwen Lister put it: “if he [Geingob] is going to make a mark on the presidency, it is going to be to break the mould. Whether he has the courage to do so is one of the most critical questions for the next years of his presidency.”¹⁰⁰

However, this is the reason why rumours spread early in the last year that the old guard would try to unseat Geingob as the acting president of Swapo at the next party congress in order to prevent his second term as President of Namibia. At first, the current Minister of Safety Namoloh was linked with the planned coup against Geingob. Namoloh, however, denied his participation in any attempt to unseat Geingob, though he claimed to have heard of a group discussing this option. Despite confirming the rumours indirectly, Namoloh did not mention names.¹⁰¹ After that, Swapo tried to cover up the whole affair and declared that there were no internal frictions. A few weeks later, however, other rumours spread that President Geingob had accused the acting Secretary General Mbumba of “allegedly not doing much to take the party forward despite him receiving a ‘huge salary’ every month from Swapo”.¹⁰² Furthermore, anonymous sources claimed that the alleged revolt against Geingob was a mere rumour that was intentionally spread to alienate the President from functionaries such as Namoloh, current Swapo Secretary for Information Helmut Angula or former Prime Minister Nahas Angula.

The reason for this conflict between Geingob and the old guard lies in the past. Geingob was part of the so-called Lusaka faction, named after the location of the United Nations Institute for Namibia where the intellectuals in the ranks of SWAPO were mainly based.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Interview Gwen Lister, former Chief Editor of *The Namibian*, Windhoek, 07 March, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Tileni Mongudhi, “Never so close”, *Insight Namibia*, 2 May 2, 2012, <<http://www.insight.com.na/never-so-close/>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

¹⁰² Confidante Reporter, “Geingob puts Mbumba in his place”, *Confidante*, March 10, 2016, <<http://www.confidante.com.na/2016/03/geingob-puts-mbumba-in-his-place/>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

¹⁰³ Interview Heiner Naumann, Resident Representative, Friedrich Ebert-Foundation Namibia, Windhoek, 17 February, 2016.

Arrested in Zambia and accused of being a spy by the 'securocrats' of the movement (the so-called Lubango-faction) shortly before the independence, he only narrowly escaped being sent to the Lubango dungeons in Angola where SWAPO imprisoned hundreds of its allegedly disloyal members. Therefore, Geingob claims that his mistreatment and humiliation by the party had already started in exile. Acknowledging this mistreatment, Nujoma "decided to compensate Geingob by putting him in charge of Swapo's election campaign in 1989", bringing him back into the party hierarchy and thereby into a potential conflict with the Lubango-faction.¹⁰⁴ In 2012, Geingob surprisingly tabled the topic of the Lubango dungeons at a "meeting of the Swapo top-four leaders, to the chagrin of those in attendance".¹⁰⁵ Since this incident, some of the old guard fear that Geingob might address the problem in the one way or another. Furthermore, as outlined above, Geingob stands for a more inclusive leadership style than the more obedience-focused Lubango-faction. While it is not possible to verify any of these rumours with regard to the attempted coup, they are nevertheless a clear sign that all is not well with Swapo and that serious infighting is ongoing.

All in all, the future of the party will depend largely on who wins the internal power struggle. If Geingob is selected as the party's candidate for the next presidential elections, which is the most likely scenario, the chances are very high that he will serve his second term as president of Namibia. This would, however, further alienate the youth around Amupanda from the 'zombies' – as they are calling the cohort of the freedom fighters. If Geingob is unseated by the old guard or his young contender Amupanda, he might decide to try his luck outside Swapo relying on his high profile in Namibia.¹⁰⁶ This would mean a serious threat to Swapo and leave two antagonistic factions – the youth and the old guard – within the party.

Namibia at the crossroads?

So far the narrative of being the successor of the NLM that brought Namibia independence has provided Swapo with a solid support base for claiming political power. However, after 27 years of independence, SWAPO is showing clear signs of 'a slow death' as an NLM, just as predicted by Southall.

In the last decades a large floating class and small but respectable middle class, with degrees from the National University or from universities abroad has emerged in Namibia. This educated middle class is willing to initiate a social struggle since even they cannot afford housing in the capital. This pressure group is complemented by the so-called Landless Movement, which organises the rural population for action on the land

¹⁰⁴ Mongudhi, Tileni, "Never so close", *Insight Namibia*, 2 May 2, 2012, <<http://www.insight.com.na/never-so-close/>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

¹⁰⁵ Toivo Ndjebela, "Swapo approves module for party school", *Namibian Sun*, 07 August, 2013, <<https://www.namibiansun.com/news/swapo-approves-module-for-party-school>> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

¹⁰⁶ Interview Rosa Namises, former activist of the Namibian Women's Voice, Windhoek, 5 March, 2016.

issue. By taking up the land issue, both groups are aiming at a Swapo weak spot, namely its failure to significantly enhance the living conditions of the majority of the population. The rising material expectations of the upcoming generation cannot easily be silenced any longer by referring to the accomplishments of SWAPO in bringing independence and peace or by resorting to putdowns such as 'Where were you while we fought in the trenches?' Furthermore, the 'born frees' cannot any longer be excluded from political power. Comments posted by AR supporters in various social media make it quite obvious that the reputation of the NLM is beginning to fade. This provides political opportunities within, but also outside Swapo. Up to now, AR has used these opportunities cleverly, linking up with other movements, inventing space outside the party framework and mobilising the youth within and outside the party.

On the other side, Swapo has been able to uphold its alliance with the NUNW and the strongest union, the Mineworkers Union of Namibia (MUN). In contrast, the unions organised in the non-affiliated Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA), which represent the better educated workers in the service sector, (teachers, cabin crews etc.) might be the 'more modern' unions, but they are at the same time less important in terms of numbers of members and economic potential. Furthermore and most importantly, Swapo has not yet lost its capability to uphold its clientelistic and opportunistic networks. These networks are bound to state resources. As the Namibian economy remains highly dependent on the mining and agrarian sector and has not seen any significant diversification over the last decades, they are very vulnerable to external shocks.

Last but not least, one-party dominance always stands in relationship to the weakness of counter-powers.¹⁰⁷ In the Namibian case this is largely true. Most observers describe Namibian civil society as weak but growing, a status that can be explained by Swapo's liberation struggle and its consolidation of power, superseding and suppressing any organisation outside the Swapo framework.¹⁰⁸ However, according to a report by the African Development Bank published in 2010, Namibia's middle class, including the so-called floating class (47.4% of the total population), is ranked as the seventh largest out of the 48 African countries.¹⁰⁹ The explosiveness of this middle class effect is shown by the case of Tunisia. Tunisia, in 2010, took the lead with 89.5% of the population officially belonging to the middle and floating class and witnessed the so-called Jasmine Revolution one year later.

Furthermore, recent developments show that Swapo's clientelistic patronage policies are proving to be Janus-faced: On the one side they are the basis of Swapo's dominance; on the other side they cause growing grievances. Therefore, according to the 2014

¹⁰⁷ Gyimah-Boadi, "Civil Society".

¹⁰⁸ Blaauw and Letsholo, "Namibia": 348.

¹⁰⁹ African Development Bank (AfDB), "The middle of the pyramid: dynamics of the middle class in Africa", *Market Brief*, 20 April, 2011, <http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/The%20Middle%20of%20the%20Pyramid_The%20Middle%20of%20the%20Pyramid.pdf> [accessed 28 September, 2016].

Afrobarometer data, 78% of the population agree that too much emphasis is placed on rewarding party loyalty at the expense of service delivery. As stated above, unacceptable corruption can, in combination with a charismatic oppositional leadership, become a pitfall for a dominant party.¹¹⁰

The AR movement under Job Amupanda might represent such an opposition. Either Geingob will be nominated by Swapo and consequently elected as the last Namibian president with struggle credentials, as is likely, or he will lose the contest to Amupanda. In the first scenario, AR could either build a strong opposition within and outside Swapo, or transform itself into an oppositional party. This could push Geingob further to inclusivity leading to rhetorical entrapment and enhanced accountability. This turn towards accountability might be strengthened by recent setbacks in regional elections for Swapo's 'big brother', the South African ANC. Developments in the neighbouring country might have a warning effect on the Swapo leadership that the credit of past merit is used up and that people will assess the party by its current performance.

If Swapo fails to integrate the new educated elite and to fulfil the material expectations of broader strata of Namibian society, this will sooner or later lead to a polarisation of the political landscape. Until then, the current party-internal factions and power struggles are more important for Swapo's strength. The party would be well advised to follow the path of inclusion proclaimed by Geingob. However, as the example of AR shows, there are still many people in the party who react to challenges and criticism with exclusion and animosity.

Nevertheless, the initial euphoria and the "independence hangover" which followed the feast of independence "is over".¹¹¹ The absence of a potent political opposition in parliament, capable of controlling, monitoring and holding the government accountable is increasingly being compensated for by an emerging and critical civil society. This civil society, at present mainly represented by AR and the Landless movement, is neither 'drunken' from the euphoria of independence nor suffering from the following hangover and is critically assessing government policies and achievements. SWAPO as an NLM, however, is dying as it has lost its "essence as 'liberation movement' [and] as harbinger of hope and freedom".¹¹² As an accountable, inclusive, and democratic party, Swapo might be on the verge of being born again. This however, will also depend on which political faction dominates the party in future.

¹¹⁰ Solinger, "Dominance".

¹¹¹ Interview Reginald Kock, acting Secretary General of the Trade Union Congress of Namibia TUCNA, Windhoek, 7 March, 2016.

¹¹² Southall, *Liberation Movements*: 327.

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