

INTRODUCTION

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The political transition processes of the 1990s in Mozambique and Angola came short of expectations in terms of promoting effective pluralism and democratisation. Within a long historical tradition of authoritarianism, violence and autocratic rule, from the colonial period through the anti-colonial struggle and the so-called socialist single party period, former single parties won elections and retained power, re-legitimising (domestically and internationally) their autocratic and authoritarian governance and hegemony. With an outstanding resilience, these regimes and elites adapted their post-independence logics and power reproduction dynamics to the new multiparty electoral process, subverting liberal democratic procedures and integrity to their strategies (as exposed in the paper of Luca Bussotti) and in sequence with long-time (since independence) hegemonic projects, despite any official ideologies or models (as exposed in the paper of Nuno de Fragoso Vidal related to the administration of Agostinho Neto in Angola).

After more than 30 years of battles around the integrity of liberal democracy with a few domestic and international oppositions, we can easily perceive that the balance of forces clearly pended to the hegemonic forces in power. After 50 years of independence, MPLA and FRELIMO, and their long-time standing elites, still rule in their respective countries in an autocratic and authoritarian way that reproduces the colonial regime in so many aspects (as clearly exposed in the papers of Malyn Newitt and Henning Melber in this issue), acting consciously to maintain their old project of hegemonic rule, now re-legitimised by more than 30 years of "illiberal" multipartyism.

According to the partisans of effective pluralism and democratisation, the consequences of such rule are blatant poverty and lack of human development still. However, against that liberal democratic reasoning, came the new international wave of so-called "democratic illiberalism", authoritarian and populist, which permeates the continent with growing attractiveness to the authoritarian and pro-hegemonic establishment. The attraction is for the new international legitimising discourse (with powerful proponents at the international arena) supporting several of the procedures that numerous African regimes have been trying to camouflage under fake democracies since the 1990s, at the centre of which are myriad instruments to distort democratic integrity. The attraction is for a discourse and narrative (aiming to become an ideology of political pragmatism or utilitarianism, as exposed in Bruno Ferreira da Costa's paper) that supposedly justifies the more-or-less violent offensives to legally constrain the independence of the judicial power, freedom of expression, of association, of individual rights and freedoms, including data privacy. Such offensives come in support of the

same old hegemonic pretensions and practices of those in power, with a new “ideologic” project and economic model that promises development through a so-called illiberal democracy and their “new” legal illiberal procedures.

Meanwhile, in face of the increasing proximity between these regimes and their new role models, like China, Russia and Turkey, among others, the West pledges and pressures of the 1990’s for the virtues of liberal democratic values and norms effectively relaxed. As exposed by David Sogge’s and Bob van der Winden’s paper, “Dependence on fossil fuels and their rents help account for the high degree of foreign official and corporate tolerance of ruling oligarchies in Angola and Mozambique, who are their reliable clients”.

In short, these are some of the issues discussed in this thematic number of the review *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, leaving several open reflections for these countries’ political, social and economic future.

A final word to say that this issue of the review comes in the sequence of several scientific outputs produced within the research project on *Pluralism – Democratisation and Electoral Integrity in Angola and Mozambique* - P-DEIAM (www.deiam.com), articulating three academic institutions – ISCTE-IUL, Angolan Catholic University and University Eduardo Mondlane –, developed between 2018 and 2024, funded by the Foundation for Science and Technology of the Portuguese Ministry for Science, Technology and Higher Education (FCT-MCTES) and the Aga Khan Development Network, within the *Knowledge for Development Initiative* programme.

This specific project is also part of the fourth stage of a larger project initiated in 2004 by Nuno de Fragoso Vidal and Justino Pinto de Andrade – entitled *Processes of Democratisation and Development in Angola and Southern Africa* –, created as an inclusive and participatory network of African, European and American academies, as well as myriad civil society organisations and international organisations alike, working on the central themes of the project, namely democratisation and development.

From 2004 until today, in each and every thematic stage of the project, several outputs have been produced, including seven books, various articles in reviews, more than a dozen international conferences (e.g. Luanda, Maputo, London, Lisbon, Wageningen, Brussels – UN & EU), sponsored panels at the *Luso African Studies Organisation* in myriad conferences of the *African Studies Association*), provincial conferences (Huambo, Benguela, Lubango – Angola), besides numerous workshops, public discussions, film and photography exhibitions on elections, etc. (www.pedeiam.com).

The ideas and arguments expressed in this special issue of the review are the entire responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the position of any of the institutions involved in supporting this work and project.