

Aspects of Democracy and Democratisation in Zambia and Botswana: Exploring African Political Culture at the Grassroots

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Introduction¹

In this paper, I shall draw attention to background aspects of democracy and democratisation in two African countries, Zambia and Botswana, by exploring not the topical developments at the national political scene (a task for which others are much better qualified), but the political culture at the grassroots, to which my prolonged participant observation as an anthropologist has given me access. Before we arrive at the specific ethnography, I shall raise a number of methodological and theoretical points without which, I feel, my argument would remain in the air. This takes us to a discussion of democracy, globalisation and the dangers of Eurocentrism, and leads us to distinguish three modes of defining democracy. After having identified constitutional democracy as only one particular variant among others, and as an item of political culture which has been relatively recently introduced to Africa, we will discuss the recent democratic positions and processes among the people of Kaoma district, Zambia, and of the medium-sized town of Francistown, Botswana. The purpose of the paper is, beyond a descriptive one, to help define the wider setting and the boundary conditions within which the more specific discussion of the democratisation process in Africa since the late 1980s can be situated; that discussion itself, however, to which our African colleagues have made such major contributions, remains outside my present scope.²

Democracy, Globalisation and Possible Eurocentrism

Our social and political life is involved in an ever-accelerating process of globalisation.³ Through formal education and literacy, through electronic media which have developed their own *lingua franca* of images which is more or less understood wherever there is media reception, and through mass consumption which spreads the silent language of standardised manufactured objects packed with meanings across the world, globalisation has produced a situation where a varying percentage of the inhabitants of all continents are familiar with and situationally

adopt the global discourse, with its particular selection of symbols and meaning. In the process, the discourses specific to their local, regional and national socio-cultural environments are far from lost, but are situationally accommodated (with varying degrees of integration, conflict, subordination or dominance) to the global discourse.

In the contemporary global discourse, 'democracy' has come to occupy an important place. It often carries deep emotional significance. It has acquired great mobilising power. In the course of the 20th century, many thousands of people have been prepared to die in struggles legitimated by reference to this symbol; many more people have admired others making such sacrifices in the name of democracy, and have spurred them on. Democracy has become a major export item of the USA and NATO. Ideologically (without denying the economic, political, religious and ethnic factors involved) the globalising concept of democracy was the force that breached the Berlin Wall and exploded the communist empire of Eastern Europe and North Asia. The global percolation of media images documenting this process has also contributed to the current democratisation movement in many parts of Africa.

The social scientist or historian reflecting on this African movement faces dilemmas that, phrased only slightly differently, are only too familiar from the study of world religions, mass consumption, styles of trade unionism, formal legislation by the nation-state, cosmopolitan medicine, and so many other aspects of the 20th century transformation of the African continent. These dilemmas address the extent to which North Atlantic models can acquire global relevance, and force us to explore the limitations of both Eurocentrism (which claims only one model to be valid) and cultural relativism (which claims all possible models, including those found outside the North Atlantic, to be equally valid and equally worth preserving for the future).

(1) The dilemma of *cultural imperialism*: is the institution of democracy, which we have seen spreading all over Africa, merely a *submission to alien* (viz. North Atlantic) *forms* which therefore will only fit like the proverbial square peg in the round hole of African cultures and societies; or is it, on the contrary, the awakening to a *universal heritage of mankind*, which has outgrown its being tied to a specific culture of origin (West European, North American, or whatever), so that Africans adopting it are merely coming into their own? In this light, the post-colonial vicissitudes of democracy in Africa would not imply any qualitative disability for democracy on the part of African societies and their members, but would be equivalent to the (much longer) formative stage of the same institution in the North Atlantic region itself (see below).

(2) The dilemma of *localisation*: even if considered global or universal, institutions invariably develop a local form; who is to say whether that local form is a regrettable deviation from abstract global standards?

(3) The dilemma of *wrongly claimed universality*: given the distribution of economic and military power in the modern world (*a basic state of affairs which the paradigm of globalisation does not take sufficiently into account, rather tending to obscure it under (illusory) postulates of cultural convergence and equality*), could members of a relatively powerful nation-state resist the temptation of claiming that their own culture-specific institutions have in fact supra-local, global relevance and truth? African democratisation gains interest and support outside Africa since it appears to liberate local African populations from the poor constitutional and economic performance of the post-colonial states in that continent. But if this amounts to furthering the *North Atlantic* model of formal democracy (disguised as universal), does it not at the same time imply the superiority of the north, and reinforce the relations of subordination which have existed between north and south since the 19th century? Could democratisation mean that local African communities get rid of a failing state, but at the same time are more effectively subjugated (ideologically, institutionally and, since local democratic performance is increasingly a consideration in intercontinental donor relations, even economically) to unequal global power relations under northern hegemony? Is that the hidden agenda of the democratisation process?

(4) *The social price of relativism*: as social scientists we can afford to take our distance from, for instance, the Christianity of our ancestors (a North Atlantic institution whose spread outside Europe is well comparable to that of democracy), but we make ourselves unpopular and politically suspect in our own socio-political environment if we try to adopt the same stance with regard to democracy.⁴ After all, who would not hope (especially in a secularising world of fragmented meaning, when absurdity has become the stock in trade of 20th century philosophy, art and literature) that such democratic principles as human rights and general elections, far from being culture-specific, would turn out to be universally applicable, to be 'true'? With the contestation by students and workers in Western Europe and North America in the late 1960s, the semantics of 'democracy' has moreover developed so as to include not only the constitutional level of the nation-state, but also participation, responsibility, initiative and competence in one's *immediate micro-political environment* (for example, on the shop-floor, social organisation or urban residential area). Democracy has become an important standard of evaluation for the legitimate managing of *all* power relations in which we are involved, and by implication for the propriety and meaning of *all* social action. The production of knowledge about democracy therefore is much more subject to social control (and thus far more prone to Eurocentrism) than many other respectable fields of cross-cultural social enquiry, for instance, concerning weaning practices, conflict settlement in polygamous households, or manuring techniques in peasant agriculture.

As an anthropological field-worker I have participated for long periods, and with as much existential commitment as I could summon, in four African societies⁵ I was not born in, and there I have often encountered — and have lived — principles

and procedures for the exercise of social power very different from the democratic ideas of my home society (Dutch urban society); in the latter, however, I consider myself a democrat. Against this background I cannot offer easy solutions for the dilemmas listed here. Meanwhile it is my contention that the current discussion on democratisation in Africa sometimes runs the risk of becoming myopic and Eurocentric in not paying sufficient attention to the analytical and methodological implications of cultural imperialism, localisation, wrongly claimed universality, and the social price of relativism — all of which are not exactly conducive to our objectivity as analysts.

Three Modes of Defining Democracy

We also need to sharpen our conceptual tools and bring them into historical perspective. Democracy is a number of things at the same time, so that the term democratisation, as the process of bringing about or enhancing democracy, may refer to distinct and quite different phenomena. I propose to distinguish three modes, designated A, B and C.

Philosophically, 'democracy' denotes a specific answer to the question as to the source, within a collectivity of human beings, of the legitimate exercise of power through legal and political institutions. In the case of democracy, that source is not a supernatural being, a king, an aristocracy, a specific gender or age group, a priestly caste, a revealed unchangeable text or shrine, but 'the people' (A). Statements about 'the people' are sufficiently flexible and gratuitous to allow the philosophical label of democracy to be applied in numerous settings where in fact, through complex symbolic, ideological, legal and military means, voluntary or forced representation and usurpation have dramatically narrowed down the range of those who actually exercise the power. Examples would include not only the recently dismantled oligarchy of the German *Democratic Republic*, but also classical Athens — where women, and (for both sexes) slaves, children and youths, resident migrants (*metoikoi*), and citizens banished abroad, could not participate in the 'democratic' process.⁶ After a succession of imperial, monarchical and theocratic options in the course of two millennia, democracy once more became the dominant legal-philosophical concept in the European tradition, and was pruned of its biases of inequality, in the American Declaration of Independence and subsequently the French Revolution, in the 18th century; the lists of basic human rights formulated in that context, still constitute the basis for the legal philosophy of democracy today.⁷

What marked these developments since the Enlightenment was the translation of the legal philosophy of democracy into constitutional and organisational arrangements that stipulate, in controllable and enforceable detail, the specific practical steps through which the ideal source of power is translated into concrete actions, offices, and personnel. It is these *constitutional* arrangements, rather than their

philosophical elaboration, which have since characterised modern democracy (B).

Direct democracy through a plenary meeting (for which a *pro diem* was paid) with secret ballot was the ancient Greek formula at one stage, and archaeologists have pondered over the potsherds and the curious many-slotted stone slabs (anticipating our ballot computers of today) used in the process. Plenary meetings with formal voting procedures (or oath-taking, or other communication methods aimed at consensus) were found in many other historic societies, around the Mediterranean and beyond, organised on the basis of relatively small-scale local communities. For instance, the democratic thrust of the Dutch struggle for independence from Spain in the 16th century derived inspiration not only from philosophical, or rather theological, reflection on the ultimate source of legitimate power by early Protestant thinkers, but also from a much older tradition of village communities collectively administering their irrigation works (polders and dikes).

It is important to appreciate the factor of scale. Village communities conducive to direct political participation at the local level still exist all over the world. Moreover, a broadly comparable level of face-to-face interaction and ensuing direct interests on a day-to-day basis is, paradoxically, found among many members of urban mass society, in so far as these spend much of their working and leisure time in relatively small operational groups as defined within formal organisations and institutions (schools, churches, factories, government departments, sport clubs, etc.). Here the issues tend to be concrete and immediately appealing, and the often informal structures for individual participation in the decision-making process may have far greater relevance in the people's consciousness, than the formal and infrequently used constitutional arrangements for democracy at the national level.

Contemporary mass society as organised in nation-states at the national level no longer allows for direct democracy (although the current state of technology would make this a dated position, now that telephone lines and other electronic information carriers capable of instantaneous two-way communication extend into the majority of residential areas and even households). The standard formula has, of course, become that of representative delegation of 'the power of the people' through individual secret ballot by each eligible citizen registered as a voter. This is so much the accepted pattern that the organisation and international inspection of general elections has become the test *par excellence* of democracy. In discussions of democratisation in Africa, democracy is often equated with the presence of these very specific formal requirements.

The lexical and philosophical roots of the concept of democracy are far older than the specific accepted constitutional practical arrangements of democracy. In current discussions about democratisation in Africa we often forget that *the constitutional form of democracy as representative government empowered through general elections is only a recent phenomenon in the north*, and had far from

materialised in its present form by the time of the Scramble for Africa which started the colonial period. *For most West European countries which effectively colonised most of Africa as from the late 19th century, the colonial period in part coincided, domestically, with a prolonged struggle for democratic rights on the part of the middle classes, workers, women, and youths.*⁸

The constitutional rights (summed up by the maxim 'one man (person) one vote') which Africans came to demand for themselves in the 1950s, thus belong to a package of modernity which, also in Western Europe, is 20th century rather than 19th, let alone earlier.

Meanwhile, the formal constitutional model of democracy has certain built-in features which would be self-defeating, unless other, less formal additional arrangements come to its rescue. For instance, the distance between the voter and the resulting national government under this model is so large, and the intervening stages and procedures are so complex, that the constitutional procedures of formal democracy may in themselves scarcely foster, in the ordinary voters, a sense of political competence, of actively shaping the present and future of their lives by participating in the decisions that most affect them; or, if they would still have such a sense of participation, it would often be based on illusion.

The negative effects of this distance can, however, be reduced in a number of ways, including:

- active participation in political parties organised on a mass basis;
- the development of a political culture of information and accountability, where citizens are aware of their constitutional rights and duties and where formal constitutional rights and politicians' performance are effectively tested by independent courts;
- the development, both in a formal bureaucratic form and through networks of lobbying, canvassing and opinion-making, of transparent links between the realms of direct participation at the grassroots level (not necessarily in political parties, but also in schools, churches, development committees, tenants' committees, co-operatives, union branches etc.) and the national political centre. People do not necessarily apply the same norms and procedures to (a) their immediate day-to-day environment and (b) more distant national issues, and whereas a rigid divorce between the local and the national (in terms of political participation and identification) would amount to withdrawal, disenchantment, estrangement, of individuals *vis-à-vis* the political centre, a properly democratic system would succeed in effectively linking the local and the national.
- direct personal accessibility of those in power through networks of patronage, nepotism, regionalism, ethnicity and co-religionism; this is not exactly an option stipulated by the global democratic model, but it happens to be the only one that is found all over Africa;

- the existence of an open and general political discussion in the wider society, furthered by the overall accessibility of the written and electronic media, freedom of the press, widespread literacy, and a level of affluence enabling people access to the media.

All this amounts to a comprehensive political culture of democracy, which cannot be reduced to an abstract legal formula 'the source of all legitimate power is the people' (A), nor to the specific constitutional procedures including general elections (B). Its essence would appear to be that *people actively and responsibly participate, and have the sense of participating, in the major decisions that affect their present and future, in such a way that they see their major values and premises respected and reinforced, in a political process that links the local and the national (C).*

To sum up, we have identified a philosophical (A), a constitutional (B) and a sociological (C) definition of democracy. All three agree that democracy is 'something of the people'. As an anthropologist I flatter myself that I have learned something of the ordinary life and the private world-view of 'the people' who were my research participants. However, working through participant observation in local settings of face-to-face relations I have only obtained glimpses of the national level to the extent to which that national level happens effectively to interpenetrate and link up with the local level. Since the 1970s anthropologists have struggled, and not vainly, to incorporate the state and the global political economy into their discourse. Therefore, if from the local level, the national political centre becomes visible only in a fragmented and problematic way, I submit that this is because the local/national relations are in fact problematic in the local situations under study, and not because anthropology has difficulty in addressing such situations. All the same, while local/national relations will be highlighted in my discussion of democratisation among peasants (generally identifying under the ethnic label of 'Nkoya') from Kaoma district in Zambia's Western Province (formerly Barotseland), and among working-class townsmen (most of whom identify ethnically as 'Kalanga' or as belonging to any of the various Tswana groups, mainly 'Ngwato', 'Kwena', 'Ngwaketse', 'Kgatla') from Francistown, Botswana,⁹ my actual research was conceived in such a way that it does not enable me to make valid general pronouncements concerning democratisation in these countries at the national level.

But before we turn to the ethnographic detail there is one more general hurdle to take. If constitutional democracy (B) has sprung from the dynamics of the North Atlantic societies, how must we visualise its reception in African societies? The current wave of democratisation in Africa since the late 1980s appeals to, and seeks to restore, constitutional rights and procedures which allegedly have gone dormant under the failing performance of the post-colonial nation-states. But when and how were they planted on African soil in the first place?

Constitutional Democracy (B) as a Recently Introduced Item of Political Culture in Africa

At independence, African post-colonial states emerged as the continuation of the bureaucratic apparatus of the colonial state, but now increasingly staffed with African personnel, and defined by a national constitution. The constitution was, in most cases, and initially at least, highly reminiscent of that of the former colonial metropole. The exercise of state power by this bureaucratic apparatus was legitimated by constitutionally well-defined patterns of popular participation through the general franchise. In the background, the constitutional process would be supported by international and intercontinental treaties ensuring the post-independent nation-state of a respected place among the world's nations upholding fundamental human rights. Usually these rights were specifically summed up in the constitution.

The specific constitutional pattern thus stipulated in the new nation-states of Africa in the 1960s could boast only a shallow time-depth on African soil. The roles, statuses, rights and organisational forms, the concrete procedures of candidacy, individual vote, loyal opposition etc., as defined by that pattern, were alien to the indigenous structures of legitimate political power which had prevailed in most parts of Africa through most of the 19th and early 20th century. In other words, the pattern was not in continuity with modes of participation and legitimation which Africans from a village background would spontaneously apply in their immediate face-to-face social environment. If constitutional democratic features were already part of the political culture of the colonial metropole, the colonial state was built on the principle that they should not be extended to the vast majority of African 'subjects'.

How did this essentially alien and imported political culture take root in the minds, actions and institutions of 20th century Africans?

Conversion to world religions, especially Christianity, the concomitant access to literacy and formal education, and the adoption of positions as workers, foremen and clerks within capitalist relations of colonial production, made Africans share in aspects of the same societal experience (typically embedded within formal organisations such as schools, churches, mines, manufacturing enterprises, the police, the army, local government) that had prompted the democratic process in the North Atlantic region up to about half a century earlier.

The African experience was not just one of humiliation, although there certainly was an infuriating amount of that. Participating in a missionary organisation as an African evangelist, in a local government structure as a *boma* (district administration) messenger, in a school as a junior teacher, in a mine as a driller or 'boss-boy', also involved (precisely while being humiliated) learning about the exercise and manipulation of power in a context of formal organisations; learning about an impersonal legal authority that derived not from God or from personal charisma through birth or achievement (e.g. kingship), but from the abstract written word of

law and regulation; learning about rigid and intricate patterns of the organisation of time and space which had come in the trappings of colonialism and peripheral capitalism but which even more fundamentally defined the 20th century societal experience both in the north and in the south. In the latter part of the world they were manifested in the layout of the residential space — segregated in terms of 'race' and status — and the rhythm of time between work and off-duty, Christian Sunday and secular weekday, not to mention the legally-defined periods of time involved in the payment of poll tax, of notice when fired, and the contractual spells of migrant labour. All this against the background of a hidden premise of West European modernity (which settlers and other colonialists struggled in vain to prevent from seeping through to the colonised subjects): the human individual as essentially equal to other individuals, i.e. as interchangeable in a manner similar to manufactured products (and workers) in the Industrial Revolution; but also, more positively, in the sense that each human individual could be taken as exemplary in the manner of biological species, chemical elements and physical laws which post-Renaissance natural science had come to define; essentially equal, despite differences in status and power (related to class and race), and as equals converging theologically in the original sin and the Christian salvation of mankind according to the missionaries' preachings; and, in a secularising society increasingly organised along bureaucratic lines, equal before the letter of impersonal legal authority. Under the circumstances it could only be a matter of time until such premises of equality were also applied in the constitutional sphere, in the sense of universal franchise for Africans restored to competence and initiative over the political and social institutions that governed their lives.

In the struggle for de-colonisation and independence a crucial role was played by varieties of *self-organisation* (trade unions, political parties, welfare societies, burial societies, rotating credit associations, ethnic and dancing groups, women's movements, and such churches as welcomed popular participation and initiative) which were soon to be patterned after the same model of formal organisation. Until quite late in the colonial period, however, only a minority of the African population was sufficiently deeply involved in imported organisational structures to internalise the attitudes and values that would make them articulate democrats in the global, constitutional sense.

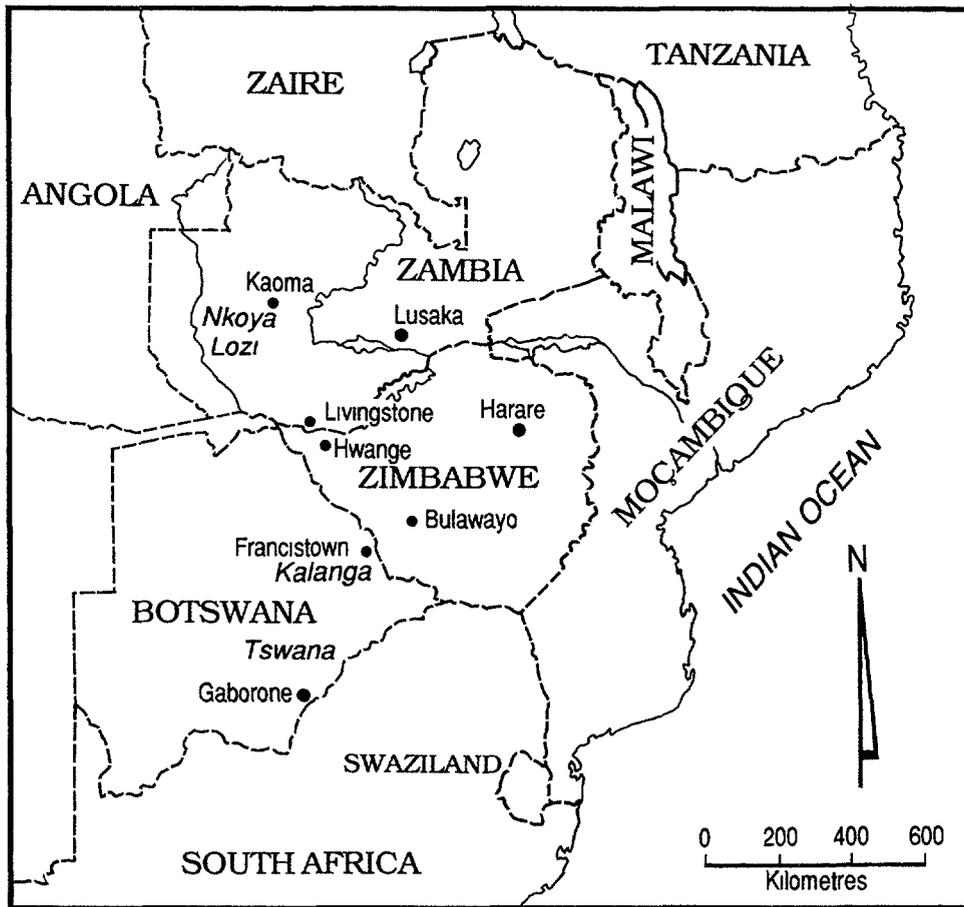
The African independence movement of the 1950s was not only about a vocal and educated African elite wrenching constitutional power from the hands of the colonialists, but also about *a broad social transformation which, through communication, mobilisation and mass organisation, made the tenets of constitutional democracy come to life for large numbers of Africans irrespective of their mode of livelihood, urban or rural residence, level of education or religious creed*. The leaders of the struggle for independence were political brokers canvassing for position, and planning a new nation-state. They were also the prophets, at least temporarily honoured in their own lands, of a brand-new democratic political culture.

They were not the only ones to offer a blueprint of a meaningful and attainable future to African populations which had seen their cosmologically structured, coherent universe fall apart in the turmoil of the 19th and early 20th century. As pedlars of meaning, organisational structure and restored competence through effective action, the independence politicians with their secular and constitutional message were in stark, often violent competition, over their following among the African masses, with witch-finders, prophets, church leaders, who locally or at a grander scale offered their own interpretations of current misery and future redress.¹⁰ In many of these attempts at symbolic or ritual salvation, there was a large amount of bricolage, the various distinct movements arriving at specific re-combinations of elements derived from the traditional world-view as well as from Christianity. The democratic movement around independence mainly sought to explore the mobilising potential of the common men's experiences of peripheral capitalism and colonialism in the propagation of a democratic and constitutional political culture which — certainly in the 1950s — was West European far more than it had already become localised and African. By contrast, the religiously-orientated alternatives to the democratic movement showed far greater continuity *vis-à-vis* the ideological and organisational orientation that had largely informed African life in the 19th century, and that was still a formidable force in the rural areas and in the kin networks of migrant workers in town. From one point of view there was, between the various political and ideological options at the time, a struggle for or against continuity of the village-based traditional world-view; from another, complementary viewpoint, various contesting categories within the changing local society manipulated alternative world-views so as to re-define the political and economic interrelations between these social categories. Chiefs, headmen, and elders in general derived much of their power over young men and over women from a traditional world-view that made these elderly men the main intermediaries between the villagers and cosmological forces (ancestors, spirits of the wild, the High God, royal spirits), and as such the indispensable mediators in the relations (sexual, conjugal, judicial) even between young men and women. For young men, particularly, this world-view hardly answered the existential questions related to their experience as migrant workers, and it denied such independence from elders as they had aspired to, and often actually enjoyed, at their distant places of work; the youth's adoption of new secular political or Christian ideologies helped them to take a relative view of the elders which had so far dominated their lives.¹¹

Thus the continuity of a cosmologically-anchored local world-view with its own conceptions of legitimate political power and procedure; the interaction between on the one hand traditional leaders and, on the other, those of their subjects pursuing modern careers outside the village settings; the prominence of religious alternatives for the symbolic restructuring of local society; the explicit formulation, and the transmutation, of democratic political values in the mobilisation process of an independence struggle; and the specific relations to develop between local and national level at, and since, independence. All these would seem

to be important factors in the production of a democratic political culture in the global sense. With this in mind, let us now turn to our two ethnographic examples.

Figure 1: South Central and Southern Africa



Democracy Versus Ethnicity in Kaoma District, Zambia

The dynamics of democracy and democratisation in Kaoma district, Zambia, must be understood against the background of its traditional and neo-traditional political structure and its colonial experience.

The fertile, well-watered lands of Nkoya (now largely coinciding with the Kaoma district, on the Zambezi/Kafue watershed, at roughly the same latitude as Zambia's capital Lusaka but 400 km west) was the scene of dispersed communities of hunters, fishermen and agriculturalists organised on a basis of localised clans, when, from the middle of the 18th century, a number of kingdoms emerged here under the influence of long-distance trading opportunities and of political ideas derived from the Lunda empire in southern Zaïre. Around 1850 most of these kingdoms became incorporated in the Kololo/Luyana state which has since been known as Barotseland, with the Barotse or Lozi as the dominant ethnic group. Barotseland became the Protectorate of Northwestern Rhodesia in 1900, and even after Zambia's independence maintained a special status within the new republic until 1969 (Caplan 1969). Under the Lozi king, whose official title is *Litunga*,

only two Nkoya royal titles (*Mwene Kahare* and *Mwene Mutondo*) managed to survive through the colonial period, as recognised and subsidised senior members of the Lozi aristocracy.¹² Nkoya traditional politics, concentrated on the Kahare and Mutondo capitals, has displayed a highly articulate ceremonial culture, involving, in addition to the royal family, a Prime Minister (*Mwanashihemi*), other titled court officials including judges, and court priests, musicians, executioners and slaves (the latter two statuses have been re-defined in recent times). Along with the senior court officials, about a dozen senior village headmen constituted the *Mwene's* royal council, where¹³ cases involving protocol and royal matters were handled, land was issued to locals and strangers who so requested, and the *Mwene's* diplomatic relations with other Myene, with the *Litunga*, and the colonial, subsequently post-colonial government were deliberated. In exceptionally important situations (e.g. death of a *Mwene* or election of a successor, the visit of a major outside official, or cases involving witchcraft accusations of royals or otherwise reflecting on the entire kingdom) the council's session would be held not in the *Mwene's* audience hall but outside, and then all subjects of the *Mwene* (regardless of gender and age) had a right to attend, whereas mature men (well over 40 years of age) and — but rarely — women of the same age group would take the floor, displaying their skills at the formal Nkoya rhetoric. A strong sense of protocol and procedure permeates Nkoya traditional politics and constitutional law. The *Mwanashihemi* is usually co-opted (by the *Mwene* and the royal council) from another kingdom so as to ensure impartial application of these rules.

Political office is within the reach of many, and coveted. The bilateral kinship system with endogamous tendencies makes lines of descent frequently merge, so that kin groups are defined by *ad hoc* micropolitical dynamics hingeing on co-residence. It is these kin groups of shifting composition which own titles of kingship and village headmanship — the proper names or praise-names of their ancestors — and whose senior male members, after secret deliberations, confer a vacant title upon a candidate of their choice by a ritual of name inheritance called *ushwana*. An honoured title as headman is therefore within the reach of many men who live to attain middle age, and even the pool out of which royal candidates could be selected used to be quite large until, under Lozi and colonial influence, patrilineal descent was imposed; but even so there are still a number of rival royal candidates at every succession. And far from being considered obsolete, the competition for offices as headman, senior headman and *Mwene* is still very lively and sometimes (in a society where poison and sorcery are commonplace) even deadly — these offices have continued to represent the highest form of career achievement, not only for those who have spent most of their lives in the village but also for labour migrants who have returned to the rural areas after living in town for decades and attaining stable and even senior positions there.

The *Mwene* ultimately derives descent from the demiurge Mvula, i.e. Rain,¹⁴ and while Mvula's relationship *vis-à-vis* the High God Nyambi is not totally clear, the kingship is explicitly legitimated by reference to Nyambi's status as the first

Mwene and as *Mwene of the Sky*. In terms of symbolic legitimation Nkoya kingship presents a Janus face: on the one hand the *Mwene* represents celestial beings and as such he is the incarnation of the cosmic order on earth; on the other hand his office is surrounded with connotations of sorcery and physical violence which are absolutely abhorred in the context of Nkoya non-royal village life. This presents an interesting puzzle for historical, symbolic and theoretical analysis, but we cannot present the details of its solution here (Van Binsbergen 1992a, 1993c). Suffice to say that there is a notion of legitimate power (*ngovu*), which is cosmologically anchored and of which the *Mwene* by virtue of a very elaborate enthronement ceremony¹⁵ is the central representative, but only in so far as his actions remain within the dignity (*shishemu*) of his office and are underpinned by the advice from the royal council, which tends to be quite vocal. *Mwene mwene na bantu*: 'a *Mwene* is *Mwene* by virtue of the people', is the Nkoya maxim. In addition to his title and regalia, *followers* are the *Mwene*'s most important asset, and he is in practice dependent upon public opinion for his continuation in office. Just like the village headman, the king is dependent upon his followers' continued support, in the form of loyalty, respect and residence within his realm; formerly also in the form of tribute and tribute labour — a *Mwene* cannot engage in productive labour and would starve to death without tribute — as happened to the impeached *Mwene* Kashina in the mid-19th century. Since people have latent rights of membership and residence including use of land and other natural resources in a number of villages beside the village of their actual residence, a failing village headman sees the ranks of his followers dwindle by their moving to different villages until the village may be completely depleted; a failing royal *Mwene* may even be killed by the senior councillors. Regicide, forced abdication and impeachment of *Myene* are documented in the region's history throughout the 19th and 20th century. For fear of being poisoned therefore, no *Mwene* would drink beer that is not tasted first by a trusted kinswoman or cupbearer.

The Nkoya political system as it has existed since the 18th century (incorporating many elements from a clan-based pre-kingship system that is considerably older)¹⁶ thus reflects interestingly on the three definitions of democracy presented above. There is a notion that high political office, however exalted a status and surrounded by taboos separating the *Mwene* from his subjects, and however underpinned by cosmological references, could not afford to dissociate itself from the people (A). There was a pattern of effective participation within the kingdom, in principle open to all subjects but in practice usually delegated to senior headmen and to mature men in general (C). But the constitutional procedures stipulating the election to high office and the exercise of power were completely different from those of the global democratic model (B), and defined for mature men a secluded realm of constitutional competence in a way which (through the exclusion of youth and women) reinforced gender and age cleavages in the local society.

Perhaps one would expect that such a historic political system offered fertile ground for the adoption of the global democratic model, also in terms of constitutional procedures. The opposite, however, turned out to be the case, as is clear from developments in this region in the 1950s and early 1960s, when Zambia was involved in the struggle for independence.

For most Nkoya at the time, colonial rule was not much of an issue. Incorporation in the global capitalist economy through labour migration had started early (late 19th century), but until well after independence it took the form of circulatory labour migration which kept people's social and conceptual dependence on their rural society of origin largely intact. The Nkoya (certainly those of the eastern Mashasha kingdom, that of *Mwene Kahare*) hardly had an option, since until *ca.* 1950 they had very little access to missionary education and therefore no basic skills that might have launched them on a stable urban career. The same lack of education, particularly illiteracy, made it difficult for the global democratic model to be absorbed by them at an early age. The imposition of colonial rule had reinforced the hold of the Lozi indigenous administration in the region, and it was the Lozi, far more than the British, who were perceived as oppressors. The seething of protest and contestation throughout the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in the second half of the colonial period, in the Nkoya region, at first took the form of symbolic reconstruction of society through witchcraft eradication (which often had anti-Lozi overtones, and was supported by the Myene), followed in the 1950s by an outbreak of blatant sorcery practices (Reynolds 1964) as if new forms of power, meaning and redress could only be found in the mystical sphere and not in secular constitutional change. Only when democratic independence pioneers in the centre of Barotseland (the Wina brothers, Princes Nakatindi) turned out to challenge the Lozi aristocratic establishment, did the Nkoya become interested in modern politics, but the *Litunga* managed to prevent the registration (Mulford 1967) of a Nkoya branch of Mr H. Nkumbula's ANC — the Zambian independence party from which Mr K. Kaunda's ZANC (soon to be called UNIP) broke away in 1958. A few Nkoya young men who meanwhile, against many odds, had managed to get some formal education and had embarked on urban careers, featured in the various political parties on the Northern Rhodesian scene around 1960. Some even started an ethnically-orientated but, abortive, party called Mankoya Fighting Fund, and in the first general elections the Nkoya massively supported UNIP, but still the issue as perceived by the Nkoya was anti-Lozi far more than in favour of independence and constitutional democracy. When at independence the Lozi turned out to have occupied powerful positions in regional and national government, while not a single Nkoya operated at these levels, and when moreover the UNIP government stopped labour migration to Zimbabwe and South Africa which had been the Nkoya's main source of cash for many decades, the interest in modern politics dissipated entirely, and the Nkoya withdrew within the confines of the neo-traditional local politics.

During my first fieldwork in the region in the early 1970s, it was shocking to see how little the local population considered themselves to be part of post-independent Zambia. Zambia was the name for a country 'out there', along the 'Line of Rail' that crosses Zambia from north to south and along which its towns were concentrated. The principles and procedures of Zambia's constitutional organisation seemed largely unknown among most villagers, and commanded even less loyalty. Democratic voting procedures were considered morally and cosmologically obscene, for implying that political office could be bought for promises, favours and money rather than being a high responsibility entrusted to the best candidate on the basis of the elders' secret deliberations, and the legitimating *ushwana* installation ceremony which guaranteed ancestral support for the new incumbent. Incorporation in the wider world had so far only produced a conceptual boundary *vis-à-vis* that world, not a sense of wider relationships and responsibilities, let alone a new sense of power and competence at the national level. Even the Kaoma district centre, with its administrative and judicial offices and UNIP headquarters, was an alien place, where no Nkoya occupied any position in the political and administrative hierarchy above messenger, driver or cleaner; Nkoya were also conspicuously absent among local entrepreneurs. Paradoxically, the most conspicuous local link with the UNIP government was in the person of *Mwene* Kahare, whose subtle manoeuvring in the struggle for independence had gained him the honour of being nominated a party trustee. Besides, he was made a member of the national House of Chiefs, and although this did not give him any tangible power at the national level, it gave his subjects in the rural areas the illusory satisfaction that when their *Mwene* was summoned to Lusaka he went there, using government transport, in order to rule Zambia! Lozi oppression was felt to continue as before independence, and there was widespread nostalgia for the blessings of the colonial period, when blankets and clothing had been cheap and migrants' cash earnings had not been subject to income tax at source.

In the early 1970s, a local branch of UNIP existed nominally but it was virtually invisible at the village level. Rather more visible was a UNIP Youth branch, largely composed of sons and clients of senior headmen who were the *Mwene*'s main rivals with regard to traditional office. With very little feedback from national and regional headquarters, the youths' activities did not consist of political instruction or mobilisation. At the time when UNIP Youths elsewhere in Zambia created havoc with their violent card-selling and card-checking practices, the Nkoya Youth made themselves occasionally useful as a work-force for communal projects (emulating a historic pattern of tribute labour). They were particularly conspicuous when they organised a mass trial where *Mwene* Kahare and his staff were accused of the kind of ritual murder that had always been part and parcel of the kingship. In the process the youths presented a list of demands that, if implemented, would have made them the *de facto* authorities in the kingdom. This challenge of the traditional establishment misfired (ultimately the *Mwene*, subsidised and officially gazetted, had much more backing from the outside world than the self-styled UNIP Youths), but what is particularly revealing is that the youths'

attack was completely inward-looking and failed to adopt the idiom of the national democratic model. The *Mwene*, on his part, could not convert his basic loyalty to the UNIP government and the post-colonial state into political education for his subjects, since his relationship with his subjects was determined by constitutional principles which were totally alien to the global democratic model.

The Nkoya participated in the struggle for independence on the basis of their own ethnic priorities, and did not yet learn much about constitutional democracy in the process. Thus the first opportunity, around independence, of turning the Nkoya into participants in the national democratic process, was almost completely lost. But not quite. I have passed over the urban experience of Nkoya migrants at the time. In the second half of the 1960s, Zambian towns were in the throes of conflict between ANC and UNIP, which was only resolved by the creation of the second Republic, under UNIP, in December 1971.¹⁷ Nkoya urban residents had participated in this process as inhabitants of urban residential areas siding with one particular party, as street fighters etc., but only a handful of them had actually taken up office in either political organisation and thus had been exposed to the inner organisational structure and procedures of the democratic process. One of them, Mr J. Kalaluka, had even stood as an ANC parliamentary candidate in the 1968 elections, but had lost. The forced amalgamation between ANC and UNIP enabled him to be a UNIP candidate in the 1973 elections, and then he became the MP for Kaoma East. When, within a few years, he managed to add a ministerial post to his seat in parliament, the Nkoya had finally found the link to the centre that was to teach them how to appreciate and make use of modern constitutional forms.

Three additional factors facilitated this process: the Lozi's decline at the national level, successful rural development in Kaoma district, and the Nkoya's ethnic self-organisation.

(a) In 1969 President Kaunda had terminated the special status of the former Barotseland within the Republic of Zambia, and the 1970s saw the decline of Lozi power at the national level. In the process, the president and his administration missed few opportunities to curry favour with the Nkoya.

(b) In 1971, moreover, the powerful parastatal Tobacco Board of Zambia had initiated a major development scheme in the eastern part of Kaoma district. Few local villagers could lastingly benefit, as tenants, from the new opportunities this scheme offered, and the farms were largely occupied by ethnic strangers. Yet within 15 years the very sparsely populated forest turned into a rural town of nearly 20,000 inhabitants, Nkeyema, with schools, clinics, a thriving UNIP party branch, etc. (Nelson-Richards 1988). For a number of political brokers of Nkoya background, including Mr Kalaluka, the scheme offered both personal economic advancement and a platform for active mobilisation along ethnic and regional lines. Here, for the first time, UNIP songs and the Zambian national anthem were sung in the Nkoya language, whose legitimate existence had so far been denied by the Lozi and the central state. Nkoya gradually awoke to the idea that the modern

state and its institutions were not necessarily inimical, either to the ethnic identity they had developed in the context of Lozi incorporation, or to the kingship that had become the central expression of that identity. While Zambia as a whole saw a period of steady economic decline in the second half of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the *relative* economic situation in what had used to be a stagnant labour reserve, Kaoma district, began to look less bleak. Realising that the state had little to offer, economically, beyond the mixed blessings of the Nkeyema Scheme, Nkoya/state contacts increasingly concentrated on a non-material deal: the exchange of the Nkoya citizen's loyal support and participation, for state recognition and consolidation of their ethnic identity and traditional leadership.

(c) This process was formalised when in the early 1980s, after diffuse preparations from the mid-1970s, a few middle-class urbanites from a Nkoya background founded the Kazanga Cultural Association. This society has since linked urban and rural sections of Nkoya life, particularly through the organisation, since 1988, of the annual Kazanga cultural festival, where the Zambian state has always put in an appearance through a delegation at ministerial level. The festival (one of the five of its nature in the country, to be announced and reported on Zambia television) is an enormous source of pride to the Nkoya, and generates all sorts of further activities and innovations in the cultural, organisational and economic fields.

As a result of these developments over the past 20 years, the Nkoya people of Kaoma district have become far more effectively incorporated in the post-colonial state. The misery, bitterness, indignation and estrangement from the state under the Kaunda administration, which marked the 1980s for particularly the urban populations of Zambia, were here attenuated, somewhat by the rural economic opportunities, but to a much larger extent by the ethnic revival the people went through, which restored a sense of meaning and competence to their rich cultural life, and created contexts in which this heritage was no longer self-consciously cherished and fossilised within a local universe increasingly sealed off from an inimical outside world, but could be communicated to that outside world, in forms (particularly media coverage) which have great prestige in that outside world, and which generate further innovation.

Interesting innovations are now taking place in the kingship. In the early 1970s the Nkoya neo-traditional court culture was marked by a rigid splendour. The emphatic maintenance of nostalgic historic forms of protocol and symbolic, particularly musical, production (which no longer corresponded with any real power invested in the kingship under conditions of incorporation by the Lozi indigenous state and by the colonial and post-colonial central state) reflected the fact that the need for boundary maintenance *vis-à-vis* the outside world was at its peak. All this contrasts strikingly with the laxity of court life today. It is as if the focus of articulation of Nkoya ceremonial court culture has now shifted from the day-to-day protocol at the secluded traditional capitals controlled by traditional councillors, to the annual public performance at the Kazanga festival, before central-state

dignitaries and a massive audience of spectators, and controlled by the Kazanga association executive. Of course, the kingship, based on a local vision of the political and cosmological order, could only lose out when the subjects came to participate more effectively and whole-heartedly in a national democratic order based on very different constitutional principles. However, at the same time a fervent reconstruction process is going on, where the Kazanga Cultural Association effectively negotiates between the state, the kings and the villagers, insisting on a new symbolic and ceremonial role for all four¹⁸ Nkoya kings together along lines which, while ostentatiously appealing to tradition, in fact constitute recent innovations, rather at variance with established historical patterns, but which do result in restoring the kings to a level of emotional and symbolic significance perhaps unprecedented in 20th century Nkoya history. During the 1992 Kazanga festival, *Mwene* Kahare Kabambi, who used to be a somewhat pathetic, stammering figure dressed in a faded suit with ragged shirt collar, appeared covered in leopard skins and with a headband adorned with regal *zimpane* (Conus shells), and formidably brandishing his royal axe and broadsword, and after drinking from the sacred pit with beer made of the year's first harvest, for the first time in living memory performed the *kutomboke* royal solo dance which kept the audience breathless and moved them to tears. After his death in 1993, his successor *Mwene* Kahare Kubama kept up this pattern at the 1994 festival.

Having greatly invested in the UNIP administration in the last decade, and feeling that they had been given a fair deal, the Nkoya were certainly not in the forefront of Mr Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), when this materialised in 1990 out of the political contest against the failing Kaunda administration. Even though Mr Kalaluka had lost his parliamentary seat, and hence his ministerial post, in the 1987 elections to a non-Nkoya contender from Kaoma district, the links to the political centre had become sufficiently open, and the sense of political competence sufficiently developed, to take a maturely democratic stance. Recalling the lack of democratic knowledge and attitudes which I found in the area in 1973, I am now amazed by the ease with which ordinary villagers, men and women, talk about the national political issues of today, and define their own position within what is essentially a democratic constitutional framework. I grant that a considerable part of the credit must go to the inspiration of the democratic movement which swept over Zambia since the late 1980s; but this would have fallen on completely infertile ground, had not a gradual process of Nkoya/state accommodation over the 1970s and 1980s, under UNIP, already turned the people into democrats with a realistic national outlook. One recognised the unmistakable need for change, and was prepared to give majority support even to parliamentary candidates (such as Mr Mandande and Mr Tumbila, the present MMD MPs for the district) who were new men both at the national and the regional level, and of whom the former did not even qualify nor identify as Nkoya. Realising that the Nkoya group had come to carry a certain weight at the national and regional level, the political and symbolic brokers that make up the Kazanga association's executive lost no time in trading Nkoya support for organ-

isational and logistic facilities under the new government. Needless to say, the promise of innovation and restoration which constitute MMD's main appeal tied in very well with the local reconstruction the Nkoya were already involved in on their own impetus. Again, the crucial inspiration appears to have been local and ethnic rather than national and democratic — but now at least within a framework of open and viable local/national relations.

However, the Nkoya have learned not to put all their eggs in one basket. Only a few months before the elections of October 1991 (cf. Sichone 1991-92; Baylies and Szeftel 1992) which brought Mr Chiluba's victory and Mr Kaunda's political demise, the latter had personally intervened in an attempt by the *Litunga*¹⁹ to downgrade or even abolish the kingships of Kahare and Mutondo. Perhaps somewhat alarmed by the prominence, in MMD, of Lozi politicians such as Mr Arthur Wina and Mr Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika (both of whom have since left MMD, however), established Nkoya community leaders, both in modern and traditional office, tended to continue siding with UNIP. Even after Mr Chiluba's installation as President of Zambia, massive UNIP rallies have continued to be held in Kaoma district, with Nkoya party officials in prominent positions. Of course, this is to be expected under a multi-party democracy, and it is regrettable that, barely one and a half years after the change-over (April 1993), the first UNIP activists had to be made political prisoners in MMD Zambia. Most recently, the National Party's success in Western Province as a whole, at the expense of MMD, is also reflected in Kaoma district, and without destructive friction the national and regional executive of the Kazanga association continues to encompass the various party-political options such as exist at the national level. Local ethnic reconstruction continues to take precedence over national party allegiance.

The nature of my data does not allow me to make pronouncements about MMD and the recent democratisation process in general at the national level (cf. Mudenda 1992). My story about one ethnic group in one rural district should not be misread to imply an interpretative pattern for Zambia as a whole, or for rural Zambia as a whole. Having not started the post-colonial period with a great deal of knowledge or illusions about the democratic constitutional process and of their own role therein, having fared much better under UNIP than could be expected, and tapping a source of revitalisation at the local ethnic rather than the national democratic level, the Nkoya could scarcely muster the great sense of frustration and anger that characterised the seasoned trade unionists, politicians and intellectuals at MMD's centre (cf. Mbikusita-Lewanika and Chattel 1990; Kamwambe 1991).

The Nkoya story is only a footnote to the specific recent history of the MMD in Zambia. But it suggests that MMD in itself cannot be understood unless against the background of the total, and uneven, picture of the emergence of a global democratic political culture in Zambia, a process in which traditional leadership, religious alternatives, and local/national relations constitute important dimensions.

Glimpses of Democracy in Francistown, Botswana

From this point in my argument, and from Zambia, it is only a short step to Botswana, a neighbouring country which appears to have remained untouched by the African democratisation movement of recent years. If the Nkoya case in Zambia brings out regional politics, ethnic reconstruction and the partial survival of a local, ancient political culture as limiting conditions to the reception of the North Atlantic democratic model, the Botswana case would suggest that further boundary conditions lie in the quality of the state's economic performance, and in the ideological construction of a sense of historic continuity in the local political culture, so that the state elite can pose as emulating, rather than providing an alternative to, political traditions as perceived by the state's ordinary citizens.

Botswana is a most interesting case among African countries, since to the outside world it has presented the image of one of the very few African democracies that has survived intact since independence; moreover it is one of the few African economies that has avoided the stagnation so common in the continent during the 1970-1980s. So the most obvious answer to the question as to why there is no conspicuous democratisation movement in Botswana, would seem to be: 'because no further democratisation is needed — the country is a viable democracy and the state delivers what the citizens expect'.

My research, since 1988, in Botswana's second largest town, Francistown has, however, convinced me that this answer is only partially correct. The Botswana state does deliver, albeit far from lavishly, and in ways which (as the Botswana²⁰ workers often complain) compares poorly with the income situation and standard of living in neighbouring South Africa, with which many Botswana are familiar from labour migration, personal contacts and the media. At the same time, Botswana is far from a totally convincing democracy.²¹

The political scene is dominated by the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Of the handful of other parties, only the Botswana National Front (BNF) and Botswana People's Party (BPP) are sufficiently organised to win a few parliamentary seats in the general elections, which are held regularly at five-year intervals, the last in 1989. The weakness of the opposition is not due to lack of politicians of great capabilities, but to lack of funds (whereas the ruling party is at least logistically facilitated by the government), fragmentation, a low degree of grassroots organisation, and the circumstance that the ruling party's powers of co-optation and appeal for peace and unity cut across political boundaries. Among the tactics which the ruling party uses in order to perpetuate its position of dominance, are the appointment of additional members of elected political bodies whenever the opposition threatens to take a majority, and persuading opposition members to cross the floor to the ruling party (a case in point is the Francistown Town Council in 1987). Another strategy is that of postponing the implementation of unpopular decisions such as the demolition of a squatter area until after elections, especially if the area in question has a high proportion of BDP supporters.²² A related and even more general strategy is securing public support in exchange for

such facilities as the state (controlled by the ruling party) has to offer: junior secondary schools, clinics, boreholes. Comparable is the government's handling of many millions of Pulas²³ of arrears incurred in the country's ambitious and praiseworthy Self-Help Housing Association (SHHA) programme: on the basis of repayable loans and monthly service levies, this programme provided adequate, occupant-owned housing for tens of thousands of town dwellers, but until well after the 1989 general elections the BDP administration chose not to take legal action concerning the arrears for fear of estranging the vast majority of beneficiaries that had often run into very considerable arrears.

The electronic media in Botswana are government-controlled and so is the only daily newspaper, although there are a number of private weekly periodicals which maintain considerable independence from the ruling party. The Botswana constitution (Republic of Botswana 1983) guarantees the usual human rights, and its extensive limiting clauses in the interest of peace and order are fairly standard by comparison to other constitutions. In practice these clauses mean, for example, that people are not allowed to use any language other than English and Tswana in court and parliament (although about 30 per cent have other languages as their mother-tongue), and that hardly any periodicals or books in these languages are published, partly because people are under the impression that this would be illegal. The use of private printing presses is subject to a licence which every printer is at pains not to forfeit.

'Freedom squares', which are open spaces set aside for public meetings of a political nature, exist in every residential area and village and are open to whatever political party applies for a permit to use them, but all political meetings taking place there are attended by uniformed police who tape the proceedings. There are no political prisoners in Botswana, but individuals who during questioning time at such meetings bring up awkward issues have occasionally been known to be taken for questioning. Similarly, opposition politicians and ethnic activists have opted for careers of self-employment in the awareness that they would be likely to be penalised by thwarted promotion opportunities, if not actual dismissal, if they pursued their activities from positions as civil servants, teachers, etc. In places like Francistown where a garrison is stationed, and especially in border areas, people have learned to fear the soldiers, whose conduct is not always subject to the kind of control one would expect under the rule of law.

With the rapid post-independence quantitative expansion of education, and the existence of oppositional politics since the 1960s, constitutional knowledge is considerable in educated and middle-class circles. However, among the general public the level of democratic awareness and actual political participation, including voting, are low. Certainly in Francistown the majority of the population would give the impression of taking the government for granted, even in the *de facto* one-party form it has assumed in Botswana, without taking great interest and, especially, without being keen on change.

Here I refer to the distinction I made earlier between national-level political participation and immediate democracy at the grassroots level of village, urban residential area, workplace, school, etc.. Batswana, both in town and in villages, do take a keen interest in their immediate social environment, and actively seek to structure it through organisation and participation. The social environment need not coincide with the direct physical environment, and often extends far beyond. In newly-settled residential areas many people find it difficult to establish flourishing dyadic, informal ties with the strangers that happen to have become their neighbours, but they actively maintain ties with people from their home village, their ethnic group, their church and their workplace (Van Binsbergen 1991, 1993a). And whenever dyadic relations can be embedded in a lasting collective organisational setting involving a number of people on a more or less permanent, formal and predictable basis, Batswana show great eagerness and creativity in the pursuit of public responsibility. Voluntary associations (especially independent churches and sport associations) are a dominant feature of social life, not only in towns but also in rural areas. The model of serious and candid consultation between equals informs the pattern of interaction at the village assembly (*kgotla*), where basic values of sociability, respect, and inclusiveness are brought out in a way which makes proceedings take on a social significance far exceeding that of the adjudication of petty individual cases. So much is the *kgotla* model the standard for ideal social behaviour, that it is immediately emulated whenever the diffusion of information, the need to arrive at a decision, or the settlement of a conflict necessitates the appeal to a common framework of interest and a shared model of action: in family matters, on the work-floor, in formal organisations, etc. In these contexts the everyday rhythm of activities including the bureaucratic division of labour and group boundaries are time and again punctuated by informal, impromptu but extremely effective ceremonies of consultation which are the hallmark of Botswana political culture. For Batswana, the test of appropriate public behaviour, decision-making and 'democracy' lies in principle in this type of practical consultation, far more than in the remote letter of any modern or traditional constitutional legislation.

As such, the *kgotla* model, as pivotal in the national culture, provides a welcome instrument in the hands of the Botswana state elite seeking to legitimate and perpetuate its position of power. Emphatic public reference to, and artificial emulation of, the *kgotla* model can produce, in the mind of common Batswana, a sense of historic continuity and legitimation where in fact there is discontinuity, transformation and unchecked elite appropriation of societal power. The skilful manipulation of the *kgotla* model in Botswana thus produces what we might designate, somewhat floridly, as 'populist authoritarianism through symbolic engineering'. Today, proceedings at village *dikgotla* and especially at Urban Customary Courts are claimed to be in accordance with the time-honoured *kgotla* model which — as the elite never tires of reminding the population — is at the heart of the Botswana tradition; but in fact uniformed police officials and clerks have appropriated the judicial process even at the village level, and even more so

in town, where no cross-examination by ordinary members of the public is allowed, the slim volume of the Penal Code is applied rigidly and mechanically without reference to customary law even in the latter's codified form, and where sessions are even closed to the public. By the same token, the open-air Freedom Squares and the political meetings which the ruling party and its weak rivals organise there emulate the *kgotla* pattern, so much so that people may take their own traditional *kgotla* stools there for seats, or use make-shift seats of rocks; but we have seen how the actual proceedings during these meetings greatly deviate from the spirit of the *kgotla* pattern. More examples could be cited, for example, the sphere of traditional leadership (where the chiefs — *dikgosi*, of old the central figures at *dikgotla* — have been turned into salaried petty officials), or the state's authoritarian management (through the Registrar of Societies) of people's self-organisation in voluntary associations (Van Binsbergen 1993b). In these fields, and many more, the same elite-engineered suggestion of cultural continuity in combination with authoritarian state control along the lines of a non-traditional bureaucratic logic can be pin-pointed.

In the Zambian Nkoya case traditional rulers, the Myene, appeared as original foci of a local political culture which, while allowing for certain forms of sociological democracy (C), could not and would not be reduced to the globalizing idiom of constitutional democracy along North Atlantic lines (B), — so that the trajectory of democratisation in that context revolved on the process of interplay between a local and a global political model, each accommodating to, and reinforcing rather than annihilating the other. In the Botswana case the situation is very different (Gillett 1973; Roberts 1972; Silitshena 1979). The *kgotla* pattern does imply the role of the traditional ruler, whose co-ordinating presence structures the *kgotla* proceedings, leads them to a conclusion, and legitimates them with the mystical sanctions of his office. Under indirect rule, *dikgosi* did continue to be the principal conspicuous political authorities in Bechuanaland throughout the colonial period, and since independence (1966) the post-colonial state has derived much of its authority in the eyes of its citizens from the skill with which it has encapsulated the *dikgosi*. In many ways it would be true to say that the central state is felt by its subjects to be the legitimate heir to the *dikgosi*. Besides, the BDP was founded by Sir Seretse Khama, heir apparent to a major royal title (that of the Ngwato), and son of the internationally famous *kgosi* Khama III. In other words, in the Botswana case we do not find a dynamic juxtaposition between local tradition and globalizing modern state structure, but the selective subjugation, appropriation and manipulation of local tradition by the state elite.

Some impression of political attitudes and behaviour can be gleaned from the following selected results of a questionnaire survey I conducted in Francistown in 1989.²⁴ The relevant questions as presented here were embedded in a far more extensive questionnaire dealing with household composition, social contacts, economic activities, health behaviour, sexuality, media consumption and church life. This resulted in highly personal and relaxed in-depth interviews each extending

over several hours, taking every possible care that the questions were clear and neutral, and building in cross-checks.

(a) Did you register as a voter? Yes (73%); No (27%). *More than one quarter of the respondents claim not to have registered as a voter, although less than one tenth did not qualify for reasons of age and citizenship.*

(b) Which party do you support? None (10%); BDP (43%); BPP (27%); BNF (20%). *Barely two fifths of the respondents claim to support the ruling party BDP, although in the 1989 elections the BDP carried as many as seven of the 11 Francistown wards.*²⁵

(c) What do you think about the following statements?

1. 'In a democratic country like Botswana, every citizen is free to form a new political party and to try and get the majority vote.' Agree (76%); Don't know (11%); Disagree (13%). *As many as one quarter of the respondents turn out not to know their basic political rights.*

2. 'Botswana would be better off if the chiefs get the powers back they had before independence.' Agree (36%); Don't know (22%); Disagree (42%). *Only one third of the respondents claim to be dissatisfied with chiefs' position in post-independent Botswana, whereas many more approve of the current situation in which the state has effectively appropriated chiefs' powers.*

3. 'It is sinful to criticise the government of Botswana'. Agree (35%); Don't know (21%); Disagree (44%). *More than one third of the respondents hold the view that it is morally wrong to criticise the government.*

4. 'It is all right to break the laws of the government as long as you are not found out'. Agree (18%); Don't know (9%); Disagree (73%). *Three quarters of the respondents give evidence of having fully internalised the state's authority.*

5. 'The government of Botswana makes sure that nobody needs to go without food, clothing, shelter, education and medical services.' Agree (49%); Don't know (12%); Disagree (39%). *Nearly half of the respondents claim that the Botswana state takes excellent care of its citizens, although almost two-fifth are of the adverse opinion.*

6. 'The people who talk about apartheid and oppose the political system of South Africa, are just trouble-makers.' Agree (37%); Don't know (12%); Disagree (51%). *More than one third of the (Black) respondents reject the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, most probably — cf. statement (3) — because political contestation is abhorred no matter how justified the cause.*²⁶

7. 'Our traditional culture is just a thing of the past — it must disappear and be replaced by the international culture which we see on TV, in the magazines, and from the expatriates.' Agree (21%); Don't know (13%); Disagree (66%). *Two thirds of the respondents claim to insist on cultural continuity between the past and the future.*

(d) Do you know your ward councillor personally? Yes (55%); No (45%). *More than half of the respondents claim to know their ward councillor personally.* (This official acts as a reference when applying for the application of a self-help housing plot, but is hardly involved in informal conflict regulation between residents at the ward level).

What these responses suggest (but of course far more data and analysis are needed in order to substantiate this point) is that — at least at one level of formal and normative consciousness, such as is elicited in formal survey interviews — the average urban Motswana view even the post-colonial state not as a structure of democratic negotiation which is ultimately empowered and controlled by himself or herself, but as a sacrosanct outside entity, which nurtures and protects but should not be challenged, and which is essentially in continuity with the colonial and pre-colonial past.

This conception of the state as beyond civil control and criticism was even projected onto neighbouring South Africa, at a time when Mr Mandela was still imprisoned, and nothing hinted at the democratic developments which were to take place after 1990. The migratory exposure to South Africa has had a tremendous impact upon life in Botswana in the course of the 20th century, and it certainly had a political effect. The first political parties were founded in Francistown by returning migrants deeply involved in the South African ANC (Murray *et al* 1987; Nengwekhulu 1979); the Kalanga-oriented BPP retains that influence, but, at least in terms of election results, has lost out locally to the populist Tswana-oriented BDP, which claims continuity (through Tswana, the national language), with the Botswana traditional culture. The consequence is the dissimulation of social contradictions in the guise of an ideology of peace and progress. From a democratic perspective, church independence, with the political acquiescence and aloofness it has implied for ordinary churchgoers throughout Southern Africa, has proved a more significant, although negative, South African export.

In such a setting, there is not much incentive for a drive for more democracy at the national level, given the skilfully-manipulated traditional *kgotla* model, illusory as it might be.

In the final analysis, it may not be the alleged continuity with the past (through language, the *kgotla* model, the encapsulation of traditional authorities, etc.) and with notions pertaining to the handling of power in face-to-face settings, which explains the majority's lack of interest in greater democratisation in Botswana at the national level, but rather the internal contradictions within the package of globalisation that has come to control Botswana today. And this is true of Botswana more than any other African country of my acquaintance with the exception of South Africa. As one would expect in a country like Botswana, it is not democratic political participation but mass consumption along incipient class lines which represents the part of the global culture which has the greatest mass appeal. Probably this selection partly reflects a concern with wealth, its circulation and accumulation, which was built into the pastoral economy and the patrilineal kinship system long before the advent of colonialism and capitalism; many centuries ago, the great Zimbabwe and Torwa state systems that once encompassed part of Botswana, already thrived on the circulation of wealth (Tlou and Campbell 1984). When consumption within a cash economy has become a basic standard of self-esteem and social prestige, as is very clearly the case in urban Botswana today, one would hardly expect to encounter democratic initiative and courage to a level higher than that found in the North Atlantic region where the dampening effect of affluence on radical political attitudes has been the subject of a considerable literature.

The Botswana's fundamental satisfaction with the *material* performance of the post-independence state must be an important, perhaps even crucial factor in explaining their lack of opposition and the absence, in recent years, of a democratic movement. The dynamics of the prevailing political culture would appear to

be a very significant additional factor, for it engenders political acquiescence and dissipates foci of contention with civil society, producing the suggestion of cultural continuity between actual state performance and popular notions of legitimate power hingeing on the *kgotla* model, which in fact is only a manipulated neo-traditional facade for an authoritarian elite state based upon participation.

Conclusion

I have stressed that the global model of democracy is a very specific, and far from universal, form of political culture, which needs to be learned before it can be expected to be applied, and which operates in the context of alternative, more indigenous views of participation, legitimation and constitutional procedure. In order to appreciate the substantial local variations within this process, national-level analyses can be fruitfully complemented with anthropological insights into the way people structure their local political life-worlds and interpret globalizing national politics within a particularist local framework of expectations and concerns. The democratisation movement in Africa since the late 1980s is often portrayed as the return to a model of national democracy that allegedly was already there at national independence but that had merely been eroded or become dormant in subsequent years. My argument, selectively based on ethnographic evidence from the grassroots level in two very different contemporary situations in Southern Africa, suggests, however, that the democratisation movement is only another phase in the ongoing political transformation of Africa, in the course of which, by an interplay between local and national (ultimately global) conceptions of political power, indigenous constitutional, philosophical and sociological alternatives for political legitimacy are tested, accommodated or discarded as obsolete. The capricious and contradictory outcomes of this process at the local level need to be taken into account, particularly by those who hope that the modern democratic model can yet transcend its North Atlantic origins and become the cornerstone of a new and better world.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the seminar on *Democratisation in Africa*, African Studies Centre, Leiden, 24 September, 1993. I am indebted to the organisers, my colleagues Robert Buijtenhuijs and Elly Rijnierse, for creating a stimulating environment for the production of this paper, and to the present journal's anonymous reader for stimulating comments.
2. For an incisive, up-to-date summary of that discussion, cf. Buijtenhuijs and Rijnierse 1993.
3. Cf. Colás 1992; Hamnerz 1987; Featherstone 1990; Van Binsbergen 1994; and references cited there.
4. In this respect, adopting a detached, culturally relative view of the North Atlantic concept of democracy falls under the tantalising category of tabooed ideas in international social science, to which my teacher Köbben (1975; 1991) has devoted illuminating discussions.
5. Khumiri village society, highlands of north-western Tunisia, 1968, 1970; Nkoya rural society, Kaoma district, Zambia, and its urban extensions along the Zambian line of rail, 1972 to present; Manjak rural society, north-western Guinea-Bissau, 1983; Francistown urban society, Botswana,

- and its urban-rural ties ramifying into surrounding Kalanga, Tswana and Ndebele villages, 1988 to present.
6. Glover 1927; Forrest 1966; remarkably, Plato and Aristotle (e.g. Bierens de Haan 1943) criticised the *demokratia* of their time, not for being insufficiently democratic but for being over-democratic, for having become *oclokrateia*, or mob rule.
 7. De Tocqueville 1954; Mannheim 1940; Doornbos *et al* 1984 and references cited there.
 8. The following summary of Dutch constitutional history illustrates this point: "Before 1848 the franchise in the Netherlands was very limited indeed. Even after 1848, at first the vast majority of the population were deprived of the franchise. Until the Constitutional Reforms of 1887, the right to vote depended on the amount one had to pay for taxes (the so-called census franchise). The Constitution of 1887 made provision for the extension of the franchise to certain, not clearly defined, categories of persons, by introducing the criterion of 'attributes of appropriate status and wealth', which attributes were further elaborated in the Franchise Bill of 1896. At that stage categories of voters included 'tax voters', 'dwelling voters', 'salary voters', 'savings voters' and 'examination voters'. Under this system in 1916 only 70 per cent of Dutch males had the right to vote. The Constitutional Reforms of 1917 introduced the general franchise for males, and in principle made provision for women's franchise. In 1922 women's franchise was enacted in the constitution. ... Invariably, the passive franchise accrued to all Dutch males who possessed the active franchise. Until 1917 women were explicitly excluded also from the passive franchise" (Winkler Prins 1974, my translation; cf. Oud 1967; Van der Pot & Donner 1968).
 9. Anthropological field-work among the Zambian Nkoya, alternating between the Kaoma district and migrants in the national capital city of Lusaka, was undertaken in 1972-74, and during shorter visits in 1977, 1978, 1981, 1988, 1989, 1992 (twice) and 1994 (twice). Anthropological field-work in Francistown and surrounding rural areas was undertaken in 1988-89 and during shorter visits in 1990, 1991 and 1992 (twice) and 1994. I am indebted to the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for the most generous encouragement and financial support since I joined the centre in 1977; and to research participants, to assistants and government officials in both Zambia and Botswana and to members of my family, for invaluable contributions to the research.
 10. A case in point is *African Watchtower* throughout South Central Africa from the 1910s; cf. also the Lumpa church of Alice Lenshina; Van Binsbergen 1981 and references cited there. For Botswana the rise of church independence as a major form of contestation preceding by several decades the formation of political parties (Lagerwerf 1982; Grant 1971; Chirenje 1977) is a case in point. For a general perspective on these points, cf. Gluckman 1971. For a critique claiming that views such as mine or Gluckman's amount to underplaying the contribution of villagers to the independence struggle, cf. Van Donge 1986.
 11. A common assumption in the literature on the articulation of modes of production in Africa is that young men went to work so that, via a monetarization of bride wealth, elders could continue to exercise their kinship-based power in new forms; in fact however, it was often inter-generational conflict at the village level (where youths have tended to regard all elderly men as sorcerers, and often wandered from one kin patron to another in a long chain of disappointment and distress) which propelled youths into a career as labour migrants. The comforts of the old African cosmologies ought not to be exaggerated.
 12. Outside Barotseland, two more Nkoya royal chiefs survived: *Mwene* Kabulwebulwe of Central Province and *Mwene* Moomba of Southern Province.
 13. Even after the state's creation of Local Courts (which were nominally independent from the *Mwene*) in 1965.
 14. The *Mwene* is thus one of the Tears [or, less anthropomorphically, Drops] of Rain which feature in the title of my main book on the Nkoya (Van Binsbergen 1992).
 15. Which is largely an exalted version of the enthronement ceremony of village headmen, and even of the ordinary name inheritance ceremony by which a surviving junior kinsmen takes a deceased's name.

16. I cannot go into the peculiar gender dynamics of high political office among the Nkoya. Clan heads and early kings tended to be women, but there have been no female Myene since the middle of the 19th century. Cf. Van Binsbergen, 1986, 1992a.
17. At the time political parties and the church provided virtually the only organisational structure for the rapidly growing squatter areas where Nkoya urban migrants used to live.
18. A fifth Nkoya royal chieftainship has now been revived: in October 1994, Mwene Pumpola of Dongwe/Lukulu will be ceremonially installed before delegations of all other royal courts and with a substantial participation of the Kazanga association executive and its ceremonial dancing troupe.
19. Who had meanwhile been restored to government esteem, and was even made Member of the Central Committee, i.e. UNIP's highest representative in the province, and a member of parliament. Under the Chiluba administration, meanwhile, state-Litunga relations are steadily declining again, while the Lozi aristocracy tends to retreat in delusions of territorial secession.
20. In line with national usage, Batswana is taken here in the sense of 'Botswana nationals', rather than that of 'people identifying as members of the Tswana cluster of ethnic groups'.
21. Cf. Holm & Molutsi 1989; Picard 1987; Molomio & Mokopakgosi 1991; Charlton 1993; Bernard 1989; Crowder 1988; Good 1992.
22. As happened with the Francistown PWD squatter area situated in the Government Camp ward no. 58; Van Binsbergen and Krijnen 1989; Krijnen 1991.
23. P1= US\$0.45.
24. The results are based on a statistically representative sample survey of 175 adults (18 years of age and older) of both sexes, resident in Francistown in 1989; of these, seven per cent were under the legal voting age of 21 years. Of the 175 respondents, 98 per cent claimed to be Botswana citizens, and 87 per cent claimed to be in the possession of a national registration card ('O Mang').
25. 'Government Notice No. 326 of 1989, L2/7/98 XX', in: Republic of Botswana, Government Gazette, 27, 59, 27th October, 1989, pp. 1398-1402 — the Francistown returns being listed on p. 1399. These data have been corrected in the light of 'Government Notice No. 354 of 1989, L2/7/126/II', in Republic of Botswana, Government Gazette, 27, 63, 17th November, 1989, p. 1504, according to which ward 67 was carried not by BPP but by BDP.
26. This was more than half a year before Mr Mandela's release from prison, when nobody could foresee the imminent dismantling of the apartheid state. However, the response was more positive to a related but differently phrased question: "The political system of South Africa is wrong and must be changed". Agree (79 per cent); Don't know (12 per cent); Disagree (9 per cent).
27. Cf. Schoffeleers 1991; church leaders and church committees present a rather more oppositional picture, cf. Van Binsbergen 1993b.

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