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Evolution of political regime and evolution of popular political representations in Burkina Faso

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Under the cover of some kind of democratisation, Blaise Compaoré's regime in Burkina Faso has developed the capacity of using and transforming institutions with the sole aim of keeping power. Without being truly democratic, this hybrid system allows parties to be set up and to actually function; it also allows the setting up of civil society organisations, an independent press to exist so that it could ensure for Western countries to back them up. It also managed to project an image of a growing democracy, or at least process in the making, while at the same time it enabled him to strengthen his domination of the political system. This paper suggests an overview of the evolution of political regime and popular representations in Burkina Faso since Compaoré became head of the country.

Key words: Semi authoritarianism, Burkina Faso, political history, political representation, election.

INTRODUCTION

During the 90s, as in some other African countries, Burkina Faso politics and institutions moved from an authoritarian regime towards a "semi-authoritarian regime" or an "electoral authoritarianism" (Ottaway, 2003; Schedler, 2006). This article traces the history of this evolution since Compaoré became head of the country (Santiso and Loada (2003). More specifically, it focuses on the analysis of two events which played an important role in the political life of the nation (namely the political assassination of Norbert Zongo in 1998 and the presidential election in 2005) in order to understand the effect of the regime's political evolution on the popular political representations. The objective of this work is to understand more the evolution of these representations and then to discuss the question of typology to apply to the Burkinabe's regime, as a "defective democracy" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997), or a "hybrid regime" (Smith, Diamond, Carothers), or a "new authoritarianism" (Diamond, Linz and Lipset, Brooker), or a "competitive authoritarianism" (Levitsky, 1997).

FIRST DEMOCRATIZATION MOVES

In many countries characterized by autocratic or single party rule during the bulk of their postcolonial history,

elections took on different forms (and the stakes changed dramatically from one care to another) with project reforms instituted during the 1990s. These reforms were instituted in response to pressures from international donors who made aid contingent on multiparty politics during the decade that followed the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and concurrently there was infatuation with "civil society" and governance reform. At the same time, many countries in Africa, Benin, Togo, Chad, Mali, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Centrafique, etc held national conferences on the question of democratic participation that led to reforms, as a result of internal popular pressures. Thus, for instance, as a result of its national conference, Benin witnessed in 1991 its first presidential elections since 1970. These reforms were not simply about holding elections, which had been long delayed by more or less autocratic regimes but they often significantly altered the political landscape (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997).

In this context, a few years after a military coup and the assassination of Thomas Sankara in 1987, the Burkinabe Government was forced to follow the move and reform its political institutions under the pressure of international institutions and regional political change (Santiso and Loada (2003). In 1990, the "popular front", a political alliance founded in October 1987 by Compaoré

immediately after the military coup d'état, held its first National Congress, formed a committee to draft a new national constitution which authorizes trade union and political pluralism. It was approved by referendum in 1991. Donors appreciated this politics and few months later, Burkina Faso subscribed for the first structural adjustment program in its history (Zagre, 1994). Running unopposed Compaoré was elected president in 1991 after the opposition boycotted the election because of his refusal to accede to demands to organize a sovereign National Conference (Santiso and Loada, 2003). A process of political decentralization was instituted in 1993 that led to the creation of new municipalities made up of the aggregation of previously distinct rural villages. These municipalities required elected officials and so municipal politics and elections took on a new importance in the country as in the most of the surrounding countries in the area (Benin, Ivory Cost, Mali, Niger, Senegal...). This process of decentralization came to be known as "political structural adjustment" because in many places, it paralleled economic structural adjustment programs (and followed its failure too). PSA was instituted in response to the international donors which realized the political nature of obstacles to technical interventions in these countries (Osmont, 1995; de Villers, 2003). In other words, donors began to push decentralization as a possible solution to the corruption of African Central Governments which posed insurmountable obstacles to the implementation of economic development programs (Bayart et al., 1999).

After the constitutional referendum in 1990, the construction of a democratic facade by the Burkinabè's regime follows this regional move and is progressively ameliorated: decentralization, creation of a National Commission for organizing elections, later replaced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), first municipal multiparty election in 1995, the second national assembly election in 1997, in which the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) won 101 seats and the opposition 10 seats. Nevertheless, even if the political institutions change with decentralization process, multiparty system and press freedom the country seemed to be always dominated by one man and one party.

In 1997, "the National Assembly changed the 37th article of the Constitution according to which the president could be re-elected only once" (Hagberg, 2002). After this modification, the president could be re-elected any number of times. Less than one month after Blaise Compaoré won the presidential election in November 1998 with 87.52% of votes faced with two puppets candidates, the country was shocked to find out on December 13th, that "Norbert Zongo journalist and director of the weekly *L'indépendant* was found dead in his burned-out vehicle with three companions" (MBDPH, 2003). For everybody, the reason of the assassination seemed clear: the journalist criticized the leadership and

denounced the crimes committed by the power. The assassination of Norbert Zongo deeply affected the national political situation and accelerated the democratic process or the appearance of it.

THE ZONGO DEATH: BETWEEN BREAK AND IMPETUS ON THE PATH TO DEMOCRACY

During the 90s like the most part of West African countries, political institutions of Burkina were characterised by corruption and criminalisation. The patrimonial nature of the state and the clientelistic relationship were the rhythm of everyday life. However, an instant an event will change the normalisation of these practices. In December 1998, the body of Norbert Zongo novelist, political journalist, father of a committed weekly was found riddled with bullets. Zongo became known as a particularly sharp and critical observer of Burkinabe politics and his newspaper was famous for denouncing crimes committed by political powers: gold traffic, embezzlement, political violence and before his death, the mysterious disappearance of David Ouédraogo, the driver of the younger brother of President Blaise Compaoré. "His articles were characterised by a mixture of investigative journalism and social commitment. Many articles ended with a suggestion or advice to the president, to the judicial system or to other powerful institutions or people" (Hagberg, 2002).

When Zongo's death was known throughout the country, in cities many people took the streets to protest. During almost two years, citizens and civil associations demonstrate their anger against the power. Some demonstrations were particularly violent; they targeted the symbol of power: the headquarter (HQ) of the president's political party, the courthouse in Zongo native town, municipal buildings, homes of the local politicians but also private shops and public infrastructures (Hagberg, 2002; Hilgers, 2009). During these few months, the country was deeply disturbed by the protests. Despite the political differences, the popular representations of politics became united under a common theme: "people were fed up with what they considered the "culture of impunity", (...) that those in power may undertake illegal actions such as killings and economic crimes without any punishment whatsoever" (Hagberg, 2002).

After Zongo's assassination, Compaoré's legitimacy was nationally and internationally questioned. A lot of people from the non government organizations (NGO's) and the opposition claimed that despite democratic elections celebrated internationally, Burkina Faso is a country under the domination of an authoritarian regime where "opposition leaders are regularly arrested and embarrassing witness often conveniently disappear or mysteriously die in police custody. The authoritarian features of the regime surfaced in the wake of the Zongo

affair”, revealing and shaking the authoritarian roots of Compaoré’s regime (Santiso and Loada, 2003).

Since, throughout the country most people had never read any Zongo’s articles, numerous scholars had to ask the main question: “How can the disappearances of a simple journalist, editor of a small weekly, with hardly 15 000 copies, in a country of 85% illiterates, raise such an excitement?” (Ouedraogo, 1999). As Hagberg argued, “Zongo represented something more than the content of his articles; for many people, he came to symbolise the courage to speak out and tell truth, a virtue celebrated in principle but much more rarely translated into practice” (Hagberg, 2002). Moreover, the Zongo’s death gave an opportunity to convert political resentments into political actions against the reigning power. For these reasons after his death Zongo became a popular hero for many people.

TOWARDS A SEMI-AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

During this period of trouble, the political position of President Compaoré was fragile. On one hand, he tried to keep his power and on the other hand he tried to increase his legitimacy in the face of numerous critics from civil society organisations and opposition political parties which were united in a “Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masses et de partis politiques”. For these reasons, Compaoré’s regime developed an interesting strategy whereby he appeared to be engaging in good governance and even carried out numerous reforms to improve the democratic system.

Some examples can illustrate this process of pseudo-democratization and attempts to improve the democratic façade of the country. This work will limit its focus on three aspects of this process: first, institutional reforms; second, politic of memory and forgiveness and third, international legitimacy. It is difficult to describe exhaustively these phenomena in an article; so, the goal of this work is to outline the general strategy elaborated by the regime in order to modify institutions that will help him keep the power and preserve its control on the country.

Institutional reforms

In December 1999, the Commission on Political Reform suggested a reform of the electoral code, the political party system, the judiciary and “also recommended the revision of article 37 of the Constitution on the president’s mandate, opting for a return to term limits” (Santiso and Loada, 2003). The Commission for National Reconciliation denounced several unresolved political and economic crimes. Under the national and international pressure, Compaoré was forced to foster an institutional reform. These reforms will give the opportunity

to co-opt some politicians from the opposition and to disperse majority probably “inconvenient”, because it is too overwhelming to provide an image of a real democracy (Santiso and Loada, 2003).

Under its politic of pacification with the opposition, the government condemned the lack of constructive dialogue and the recurrent boycott of the election. In this context, the municipal election in September 2000 was a first opportunity for opposition parties but also for the government itself. Opposition won 6 municipalities out of 49, including Koudougou, the third largest city of the country, home town of Norbert Zongo and of Hermann Yameogo, son of the first republic president, who became the leader of the political opposition. In November 2000, after some new demonstrations and violence, a new government was formed by the new Prime Minister Ernest Paramanga Yonli on the basis of an official agreement with eight opposition parties. Herman Yameogo’s party received three ministries. For both the country and the international community opinions, this initiative gives the impression of a more open political space. Nevertheless, through this integration a part of the opposition in the government, the political power divided the public opinion and more specifically the opposition coalition between those who wanted to participate within the government and those who boycotted all forms of participation. Since in the beginning the conciliation in the opposition was complex, Yameogo promotes a political neo-liberalism and the Collectif leaders support an extreme leftist ideology. Because of his participation in the government, Herman Yameogo will be excluded from the Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masses et de partis politiques (Santiso and Loada (2003). Beyond the public opinion, this strategy divided the Collectif and cracked the unity of demonstrators. In few years, these divisions within the opposition will undermine its strength and efficiency. But at this moment, the protests were too strong to feel exact repercussions of this division. Moreover, most significant consequences of the technical improvement of the electoral system were visible after the parliamentary election of 2002. As was analyzed by Loada and Santiso (2003), this election shows an increasing degree of political competitiveness, a high voter turnout (65%), an increasing congruence between the percentage of vote and the number of party seat. However, one observes that under the cover of some kind of democratisation, Blaise Compaoré’s regime has developed the capacity of using and transforming institutions with the aim of keeping power.

In fact, the legislative election in 2002 provides an illustrative example of this phenomenon. Since 1997, only 10 out of 111 members of parliament were not members of the majority party. After the legislative election in 2002, 54 members of parliament belonged to the political opposition and 57 from groups that sustained Compaoré. If this result testifies the growth of the opposition it also improves the democratic legitimacy of the government.

Furthermore, the political openness facilitates the co-optation of opposition politician and makes them liable for implications in legal or illegal business and cases related to the criminalization of the State. The regime takes care of the group who has a political influence and gives them a bigger inducement if they are not supporting the government enough. PJ Laurent described, for instance, how the power has managed to co-opt Pentecostal Movements, who had initially denied any involvement in politics, which was at first considered by them as corrupted and full of sinful practices. Nevertheless after Compaoré appealed to several key leaders of this powerful movement, the group has joined the National Independent Electoral Commission CENI. The head of the Commission belongs to the Assembly of God which includes about 700,000 faithful in Burkina Faso (Laurent, 2003, 2005).

To mention as an illustration of this "semi-authoritarian" mood of the regime, one can evoke that the major reforms the regime was forced to concede due to the crisis following the murder of Norbert Zongo were later neutralized in practice. The two terms limit reestablished in 2000 was declared non retroactive by the constitutional Council in October 2005, the electoral reforms made in 2001 were reviewed in 2004 to make the electoral system less proportional, the judicial reforms did not impede the judge to close in practice the Norbert Zongo case in 2006, etc.

Nevertheless, all the first modifications of the institutions provided a fresh image of Burkina. After the legislative election in 2002, major political commentators asserted that the country was in a critical moment of its political evolution. In fact, without being truly democratic, this hybrid system allows parties to be set up and to function. It also allows the setting up of civil society organisations and independent press. All of this is necessary to have the support of the Western countries build an image of democracy or, at least an image of democracy in progress. At the same time these reforms make possible a reconfiguration of the political field which enables Compaoré to strengthen his control on the country. This ambiguous system "combines rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits (...). Semi-authoritarian systems are not imperfect democracies struggling toward improvement and consolidation but regimes determined to maintain the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to the political risks that free competition entails" (Ottaway, 2003).

Politic of memory and forgiveness

Different strategies in relation with "traditional" culture have been used to increase the legitimacy of Compaoré.

Few months after the death of the journalist, Zongo, a "College of Wise Men" was created that included in its board former heads of state, and religious and political authorities. The College was mandated to make suggestions to resolve the crisis. This politics of reconciliation uses the symbolic power and prestige of the chieftaincy, religious and former political leaders to give an appearance of unanimity behind the president.

In March 2001, three years after the murder of Zongo, the government initiated a National Day of Forgiveness. Several political and religious leaders welcomed the initiative of a National Day of Forgiveness perceived as an opportunity to unite the nation. The notion of forgiveness is essential in the moaga system of beliefs (the moose is the main ethnic group in Burkina Faso). Basically, if the forgiveness is asked following traditional procedures, it is forbidden to refuse to excuse the culprit of a sin. "Sugri nooma" people say in moore which means "forgiveness is good". The National Day of Forgiveness, which is now commemorated each year, follows a move that try to integrate forgiveness in the political sphere. According to Hannah Arendt (1998) and Paul Ricoeur (1985), forgiveness constitutes a political greatness. It is the only approach able to evoke the memory without involving resentment, hate, or vengeance and the objective is not to revivify the painful aspect of collective history or to erase some events from memory but to show that others actions were possible and to change the meaning of the past. Since Willy Brandt, head of Germany at this time asked forgiveness for World War II crimes and genocide during his visit to Varsovia in 1970, the principle of forgiveness seems to become more common in politics. Vaclac Havel (Czechoslovakia), Lech Valesa (Poland), Jacques Chirac (France), Guy Verhofstadt (Belgium) have also used this strategy and in 1995 South Africa parliament created the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (Rossoux, 2000).

Forgiveness involves the recognition of victims, their status and their damages. In Burkina Faso, the official reason of this annual commemoration was to create politics of memory and of forgiveness for "tortures, crimes, injustices, persecutions and all other faults committed on Burkinabe by other Burkinabe in the name of the State, from 1960 until today" (L'Opinion April, 4, 2001 quoted in Hagberg, 2002). Through the Day of National Forgiveness, Compaoré converted the personal responsibility of his government into a collective responsibility since Independence. As Rosoux explained, this principle of political forgiveness poses some difficulties (Rosoux, 2000). First, politicians ask forgiveness for something that they have not directly committed. Furthermore, responsibility is also personal and the fault is not transmissible from a generation to another. Even if a nation has to manage its past and its responsibility, future generations are not guilty for the actions of former generations. Second, in principle, each

person should be free to forgive or not for the prejudice that he has suffered. However, the collective forgiveness assumes that all the people accept the forgiveness. Politicians give the agreement for forgiveness in the name of victims, who are still alive or already dead.

Despite these difficulties, the Day of National Forgiveness enhances Compaoré's legitimacy. The president appears as a man of wisdom and pacification able to unite all the traditional forces to preserve the peace in the country and lead them to improvement in good governance. This image is also essential for the international status of Compaoré.

International legitimacy

The strategy to cultivate a façade of democracy is really important for the country's international image. For many years, Burkina is known for the organization of international events. In 1996, Ouagadougou organized the 19th Conference for Heads of State from France and Africa; in 1998, the 34th Heads of State Conference of the Organization of African Unity; in 2004, the 10th Conference of French Speaking Countries, the first international meeting for a universal access to medicine against AIDS in 2005... Sport and cultures give also some occasions of international valorization: African Nation Cup in 1998, Faso bicycle tour each year, Kundé ceremony which awards national and international musicians, Pan-African festival of cinema and television...

After his military coup in 1987, Compaoré has tried to appear as a respectable politician but his reputation is still contested. Compaoré is accused to have supported some attempts of coup d'état in Nouakchott, Yaoundé and Abidjan; to have been the friend of several warlords as Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia; Foday Sankoh, leader and founder of the Sierra Leone rebel group Revolutionary United Front; Jonas Savimbi, leader of National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. In March 2000, "Burkina's alleged involvement in illegal arms trade and diamond smuggling in sub-Saharan Africa was revealed in a United Nations report submitted to the Security Council in March 2000. This report incriminated President Compaoré personally and accused his government of breaching UN sanctions on arms trade" (Santiso and Loada, 2003). Compaoré seems implicated in numerous conflicts which affected Africa and the assassination of Norbert Zongo shows that the violence can be committed within his country.

Nevertheless, politically, Compaoré also tries to have a good image. He was a mediator in several conflicts (example, during the Tuareg conflict in Mali and Niger, the crisis in Togo in the beginning of the 90's...) and tried to present Burkina Faso as a regional leader. Model child of Bretton Woods Institutions, at the head of the "Cotton initiative", which gathers six West African countries to

valorize the price of African cotton, Burkina Faso was the first heavily indebted poor country elected for a financial program by the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The MCC is a United States Government corporation designed to work with some of the poorest countries in the world. Established in January 2004, MCC is based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces good governance, economic freedom and investments in people. MCC's mission is to reduce global poverty through the promotion of sustainable economic growth. Before a country can become eligible to receive assistance, MCC looks at its performance using different indicators like the level of democratisation. For the Burkina Faso, the access to this program is thus, a symbolic one as well it is like recognition for the effort in favour of democratisation process and good governance. This recognition shows also that the international opinion can forget that Compaoré's regime was brought about through bloody military coup and is maintained through the power of repression, intimidation, assignation of opposition functionaries to the remotest place in Burkina, unexplained disappearances (Zongo, 2000; Lejal, 2002; MBDHP, 2003).

The role of Compaoré during the difficult period of the Ivory Coast's crisis symbolises perfectly the ambiguity of his reputation. On one hand, Compaoré explained to the press the necessity of stabilizing the situation in Ivory Coast and gave a message of peace and freedom. On the other hand, the presence of Ivoirian militaries in Ouagadougou during the trouble shows the real implication of the regime in the situation of his Ivorian neighbour (Banégas and Otayek, 2003). In Burkina Faso, this ambiguity gives Compaoré a double image: A man able to provide a good international image for the country, a strong leader able to keep the peace in Burkina, a protector of the Burkinabe diaspora in Ivory Coast but on the other hand, a powerful former military man with strong connections to disreputable friends and a head of the state for more than 20 years who can not be contested without danger.

Popular institutional reforms, politic of memory and forgiveness, enhanced international legitimacy have been used as the three tools to promote an image of democracy in progress, to begin a political decompression and to insure the control on the institutions. Today, Compaoré is a specialist in building the appearance of democracy. The numerous international politics, sport and cultural events are helping to promote an image of a democratic country. The regime holds regular multiparty elections, allows parliament to function, recognizes the rights of citizens to form association and permits an independent press to operate. With the decentralization and communal elections, new local stakes appears for both existing and upcoming politicians. This emergent democratic public sphere gives also an opportunity to rally and absorb all contending forces and to reinforce the power of big men, which is

constituted through accumulation and redistribution. In other words, in this pseudo-democratic process, Compaoré is not in danger of losing his power, not because he is popular but because as one will see, he knows how to produce a procedural democracy, forms of democratic game and in the same time preserves his control on institutions.

Ottaway uses the term, "semi-authoritarian regime" to qualify this sort of political organization. "The semi-authoritarian regimes cannot develop the institutions they would need to perpetuate the allocation of power without causing the democratic façade to crumble. Nor can they allow the democratic institutions to function without hindrance, without putting the continuation of their control in jeopardy. Semi-authoritarian regimes thus, constantly undermine their own institutions, usually by generating and exercising much power outside their realm, or more rarely by manipulating them endlessly (...). Semi-authoritarian regimes have institutions, but the semi-authoritarian regimes itself is not institutionalized" (Ottaway, 2003).

A PARADOXICAL PLEBISCITE" THE CASE OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN 2005

One of the most important ways to understand life under semi-authoritarian regime is to analyze the evolution of popular political representations. How do people feel about politics and politicians, the government and elections when they experience some reforms which have the appearance of democracy but not necessarily in its substance? Because of its history, Burkina Faso constitutes a particularly interesting case to analyze for this kind of phenomenon. The Zongo case gave a wave of hope and increased the political character of the public debates. The superficial stability of this regime usually masks a host of severe problems, unsatisfied demands that need to be managed lest they lead to crises like the Zongo case. After the legislative election in 2002, the opposition was more represented but Compaoré used different strategies to make sure his power stabilized. What are the consequences of such a political organization for the country's inhabitants? More specifically what are the consequences of this political situation on the popular political representations?

The protest after Zongo's death gave hopes to the common person in Burkina. People started to believe that it might be possible to change the management of the state. After Zongo's murder and the ensuing protests, the successful results of the opposition at the election and the creation of a *gouvernement d'union nationale* provided a new image for the country. A lot of intellectual or international observers thought that political alternation would be possible (Loada and Santiso, 2003; Banégas and Otayek, 2003). Nevertheless, on November 13, 2005, six years after the murder of the journalist, despite

the appearance of a political alternative and despite popular dissatisfactions with his politics, Blaise Compaoré was re-elected president for the third time in a row, with 80% of the votes countrywide. This high score was paradoxical given the significant opposition to the Compaoré's regime in the late 1990s, the growth of opposition parties and the ongoing dissatisfaction of the population at large. The presidential election in 2005 gives a good opportunity to see the consequences of the political decompression process in the country and understand how people feel about it.

Different elements may explain the result of the last presidential election which Loada calls "paradoxical plebiscite" (2006). The power of the president and the ambiguities of the opposition probably explain the vote and its popular justifications. President Compaoré's high score is best understood in terms of the ruling party's powerful clientelistic machinery, the president's new-found popularity in the face of the Ivorian crisis and the opposition's state-sponsored weakness, three major issues that will now be briefly discussed.

First issue, the party's clientelist machinery: The widespread and systematic small everyday corruption observed at the heart of the public sphere in Burkina is strongly linked to the contemporary way State services function daily. The basic forms and strategies of corruption are embedded in a context of dysfunctioning public services. These strategies are legitimated through social and economic logics. Corruption contributes to transform the State through progressive privatization and informalization of public services (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006). The presidential campaign does not escape these phenomena. It is crisscrossed by networks of corruption professionals, whose competence depends on their mastery in redistributing false expenses, achieving deals in a weakly regulated State. During the presidential campaign, one notices an increase in political client based relationships whereby citizens receive money from politicians in return for their votes and one observes political bribery relationships whereby politicians receive money in return for political favours. After twenty years at the top of the State, no candidate for the presidency can compete with Compaoré's networks and struggle against their efficiency. In Burkina Faso, most people participated in the election process because of their economic and social conditions and have in fact a radical critical stance and cynical opportunism. For the youths, the commitment in a party is hardly ever connected with its ideology and its political goals (Kieffer, 2006; Mazzocchetti, 2006). No body is lured by this kind of commitment. It reinforces the feeling of a lack of alternative and the perception of politics as a business.

Second issue that of uncertain economic and social circumstances and more specifically the president's new found popularity in the face of the Ivorian crisis: Conflicts between various groups in the Ivory Coast are

longstanding. However, serious these conflicts are, they have always been limited to economic competition and struggles over land rights between local populations and migrants. Each year several hundred thousand farm workers from Burkina Faso migrate to Ivory Coast in search of paid labor. Actually, approximately three million people from Burkina Faso live in Ivory Coast. Before the 2005 presidential election in Burkina, the war modified the nature of community struggles in Ivory Coast. It systematized a radical, political and cultural opposition between the North, where a lot of Burkinabe live and the South, thus, putting at great risk the integrity of both communities and geographical borders. First presented as an "Ivoirian affair", the war in Ivory Coast has become a regional crisis, being marked by the increasing participation of neighbouring countries. Burkina Faso plays a central part in this imbroglio. The government of Burkina Faso has a responsibility in the crisis and there are boomerang effects on the political situation in the "country of honest men". Actually, after the Zongo case, the Ivorian conflict had significant windfall effects on President Compaoré's position. The destabilization of the Ivory Coast threatened Burkinabe immigrants in the country and Blaise Compaore sought this opportunity to act as a defender of his Burkinabe brothers in a neighbouring country in some speeches and in the press.

Third issue, that of the weakness of opposing political movements: Blaise Compaore and his acolytes managed to develop some strategies to divide the political parties within the opposition. Under the cover of a political discord, the main opposition leader, Herman Yameogo, was excluded from his own party (Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally, ADF-RDA) in 2003. Gilbert Ouedraogo, who was the national assembly vice-president, seized power and few months later gave the party support to Compaoré. The new party founded by Herman Yameogo was weak and highly contestable (Hilgers, 2006). After they received 30 millions of CFA from Blaise Compaoré for their campaign, the two leaders of United Burkinabe Opposition (OBU), Laurent Bado and Emile Paré were divided on the question of using the resources and finally decided to run in different parties. The Sankarist tendency was also divided in three parties. Thus, before the election, there was no convincing party to oppose Compaoré. They were only small group and they were particularly divided. Moreover, the money available for the little parties for their campaigns was anything comparable with what Compaore could rely on. To give an example, Benewende Sankara, the second candidate in terms of votes spent only 12 millions of CFA on his campaign. Officially, Blaise Compaore spent approximately 1 billion not to mention the use he made of State resources and gifts from others neighbouring heads of State or from Burkinabe contractors. With such a discrepancy between the opposition's resources and the money of those in power there seemed to be no viable alternative.

This perception is also probably reinforced by the "patrimonialism" trend which underlies this kind of regime. In Burkina Faso, this patrimonialism is at least characterized by two phenomenon: (1) the growing political role of the President's family, particularly his little brother François Compaore, who is officially a "special adviser" but is also called by people the "little President" and perceived as a potential successor to Blaise Compaoré; (2) the growing imbrication of politics and economy in Burkina Faso, particularly the attempt of the family of Compaore to control the Burkinabe's economy, particularly the growing role of François Compaoré's mother in law.

THE EVOLUTION OF POPULAR POLITICAL REPRESENTATIONS

The clientelistic machinery, the Ivorian crisis, the weakness of the opposition and the inequality of social and economic capital are the main elements to explain the victory of Compaoré in 2005. Today the local populations do not perceive any possible alternative to the Compaoré domination on the country. There is such a chasm between the opposition's resources and those of the ruling power that -seemingly- there is no credible alternative. This feeling, which is shared by the local populations, has grown stronger due to the skill of the regime in "reappropriating-integrating" criticisms which it has to face. After the death of Zongo, the press has gained some amount of freedom, the opposition is getting more representative, the political discourses in the public sphere are more critical, a "National Day of Forgiveness" pays tribute to all the victims of all political crimes since the independence. If this kind of criticisms and opposing critical attitudes drive the current regime into making improvements, it will not be sufficient to overthrow the regime. The lack of radically different alternatives is actually looked upon as inevitable and the same team stays at the head of the State. The real power for change is concentrated within small elite groups who monopolize the access to politics and determine a way of practicing politics. The modification of the 37th article of the constitution is a good example to understand this process. The constitution was amended in 2000 to limit the presidency to a 5 year term, renewable only once, starting with the November 2005 election. This amendment is still controversial because it did not make any mention of retroactivity, meaning that President Compaore's eligibility to present himself for the 2005 presidential election is a matter of debate. The Constitutional Court ruled in October 2005 that the amendment was not retroactive and Compaore won the November 2005 presidential election with over 80% of votes.

The lack of political alternatives has become an entrenched part of the normalized political framework

which further undermines the democratic process and the general ability to create real and lasting political reforms. One of the major consequences of this situation is that people are being conditioned by this political context. Numerous Burkinabe people consider the lack of political alternatives as consistent with the political framework of their country today (Hilgers and Mazzocchetti, 2006). Sometimes, they even justify the situation culturally: "African democracy is democracy without political competition". Compaoré himself used this argument when he explained that for the democratisation, each country as his own process and that is necessary to prepare progressively the nation for the democracy (« Compaoré à confesse », *Jeune Afrique L'Intelligent*, Novembre, 24, 2004). For people, this is not a necessary good feeling but given Compaoré's economic, symbolic and social power there seems to be no alternation possible. After twenty years of Compaoré's regime, the situation is now seen as normal. Few years after Zongo's murder, the lack of credibility of the opposition and the regime's ability to integrate criticisms and build a democracy façade have reinforced the popular belief that the actual Burkinabe political system does not provide a place for a deep change.

Indeed, most Burkinabe people think that politics is the privilege of the elite who monopolizes resources and opportunities. In such a context, politics is not perceived as having innovative potential to change people's lives for the better. Innovative projects, such as the struggle against genital mutilations, supported by the NGO's are not perceived as political. In the popular representations, politics is relegated to the sphere of business and profits without any social welfare or ideological objective. In such a context, illegal practices and corruption become the norm. Beyond all the politically correct discourses, politics is just seen as another business and an opportunity to integrate different business networks. Consequently, in cities, a lot of people think that politics is a lucrative way to establish oneself in the business world, to achieve symbolic status and climb up the social ladder. Here, a new figure of success with fairly ambiguous status has appeared. The "nouveaux riches" have built their fortunes on fraud, swindling and resources of extraversion. They have conjured up more than the simple jealous, envy and desires of the young men in the cities. Actually, they have given rise to a new model of success stories, which is indicative of changes in the itineraries of power and wealth accumulation in the context of the criminalization of the State (Banégas and Warnier, 2001). Today, a successful person is someone resourceful, ready to go to all lengths to succeed and to resort to a whole constellation of practices associated with the art of opportunity-seeking. Such practices have spread throughout all strata of society, becoming a real moral economy in a time of austerity. These practices have greatly influenced representations of the State.

In popular discourses as well as in popular practices,

the political horizon is narrow and the possibilities of real social change are scarce. At the same time the government makes use of people's fears, pointing to other countries of West Africa, which are troubled. Disregarding the Zongo's case, Burkina Faso can be politically speaking considered as a peaceful country. This is why some people claim that Compaoré's regime is better than war, so justifying their votes and establishing a status quo. In general, people have used three main arguments to justify their votes. Compaoré maintains the "social peace". He is already rich. The others candidates have not enough of money and consequently if they are elected they risk to take too much in the State resources in order to keep the power. He is the only person able to manage the country (Hilgers, 2006). Consequently, resignation and fatalism are not surprising. These attitudes reinforce political representations which in their turn encourage resignation and fatalism when people think about the mid-term.

Even if those in power show some democratization efforts, the Burkinabe population does not perceive the actual political system as a step towards democracy. The political liberalization gives an access to economic and social capital which reinforces the regime monopoly and makes the changeover more difficult. Today, the opposition is particularly weak and runs out of steam. To illustrate this process one can evoke the funding of opposition parties by the President himself (see *Le pays Le Pays*, July, 4, 2005 and *L'indépendant*, Augustus, 6, 2005). An opposition's leader explained during his meeting for the presidential election in 2005: "the president, Compaoré needs to have an opposition to appear like a leader of a democratic country" (Laurent Bado meeting 2005). Three years after the legislative election, which apparently indicated a political change, Compaoré had both the support of his party and the support of the main opposition party for the following presidential election. In this configuration, elections are just a tool to preserve the position of the elite and to integrate the new important figures in the presidential surrounding. Elections are not a real opportunity for a new leadership to emerge. The opposition is there to guarantee a necessary democratic façade.

The recent results of the last National Assembly election in May, 2007 have not changed this situation. According to results released by the CENI (Independent National Electoral Commission), the Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) group and the Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally (ADF-RDA) group has won 73 out of the 111 seats in the National Assembly. Opposition parties in Burkina Faso performed poorly as compared to their results in the former parliamentary elections. They obtained 54 seats in 2002 and 38 seats out of 111 in the 2007 legislative.

To analyse the relation between institutional improvements and political representations, the municipal election provides also some good information and the

stake of this election is different. It is more close to people and their direct interest and it constitutes a particular moment in the political life of the country. However, once again, after the progression of the opposition in 2000, where it won in 6 municipalities, the result in 2006 again confirms the domination of the main party in the country.

In 2006, municipal elections were extended all over the country. This process of extension follows the two first municipal elections ever held in 1995 and 2000. One major problem is the decrease of participation in the election. The voter turnout was 69.61% in 1995 and 66.02% in 2000. For the first time in the country history, the voter turnout in a municipal election was less important than in a presidential election (49.12% in 2006 and 57.66% in 2005, respectively). The last presidential election has probably played a role on this phenomenon. The good result of Compaoré, the demonstration of his power during the campaign, the weak stake of this municipal election for the national level, these have probably influenced the result. However, to understand this decrease, a microanalysis of the voter turnout seems necessary. Each area has its particularity and for some of these it was the first municipal election (Hilgers and Jacob, 2008).

The CDP won 320 out of 359 municipalities (49 out of 57 urban and 271 out of 302 rural). Thus, almost without alternation, the democratization process, which is fostered by decentralization, continues. Nevertheless, because of these elections population became progressively more aware of their vote weight. Furthermore, because of numerous land management operations, decentralization of cooperation and new municipal institutions these elections have become progressively important for the local population. Municipal elections have given an opportunity for broad families to use their new political weight to defend their own interests (Hilgers, 2008b). In addition to that decentralization has revived the rhetoric of autochthony and has stimulated local debates on the future of municipalities (Geschiere and Jackson, 2006; Hilgers, 2007a, b). These elements are a sign of democratization even if this democracy takes place within the main party hegemony. From this point of view, local elections are particularly interesting to study and to understand the evolution of the popular political representations.

If such a formal democracy can marginalize the institutionalized political opposition and manage to integrate criticism, can it really silence people's political conscience and popular opposition? A first step to investigate this question in the African studies was initiated in the 80s by Bayart and his group who show how popular resistances and the politics from the bottom actually work (Bayart, 1980, 1982; Mbembe, 1988; Bayart et al., 1992). Such practices as fiscal disobedience, singing subversive songs, the occupation of public space show at least some evidence of opposition.

The perception of a lack of alternative does not mean that people are passive. When the author of this work describes a kind of fatalism, he describes how the people feel the actual system. It does not mean that it will be stable for the next 30 years; it does not mean that these perceptions would not change if Compaoré lost an election or left the power. Analysing critical representations of power and the daily shows of insubordination, allows one to understand the way that populations have built up their own political universe in which they try to comply more or less with it, even to the point of transforming it in their own way. In this perspective the analysis of municipal election provides also some important clues to understand the evolution of popular perception of politics. Stakes of the presidential or municipal elections are different for people everyday life. Generally, the decentralization process stimulates strategies from the power to preserve the stability between local interests, political parties and politicians through the reinforcement of the former local political configuration. Nevertheless, this is only possible if candidates reflect the power relation within the party and if according to the population they are a "good" candidate. A good candidate for the party is not necessary a good for the people. If people are not agreeing with the choice of the candidate they can threaten to boycott the election. A detailed observation of electoral dynamics at the local level shows that political learning is highly related with local history and social configurations. Sometimes, municipal election confirms the former political configuration; sometimes it gives an opportunity to minority or marginalized groups to constitute a political force assert their interests and change the power relations (Hilgers and Jacob, 2008). Once again, it shows that people are not passive and are concerned by their political situation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The political crisis that followed the murder of Norbert Zongo in November 1998 gave an impetus to and accelerated the democratization process in Burkina. Today if Burkinabe democracy is not actually democratic, this is not first and foremost because of its electorate – who have demonstrated remarkable maturity (Loda, 2006) – but rather because of the State and its political elite. Nevertheless, despite an obvious popular attachment to democratic values, people have progressively accepted the lack of alternative and consider it as normal situation. This is the everyday context of their own political system, which they think is better than in some neighbouring countries troubled by violence. Even, or maybe because, there is no possible alternative in a short term, political figures stay important social figures. They represent success and power. Being a politician is associated with wealth, prestige, transnational

and political connections. Such representations have little to do with those of such heroic figures of independence or social commitment such as Sankara or Lumumba. Today these heroes are being replaced by immoral protagonists who do not hesitate to kill people and associate with occult forces in order to ensure their own prosperity. Nevertheless, even if they do not feel a short term alternative at the national level, some people have understood that the political reconfiguration provoked by decentralisation gives an opportunity to constitute a local political force and to defend their own interest in local conflicts. With the decentralization process and municipal election, the research has to focus on the difference of perception related to different election levels.

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