REGIME TRANSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA - LIBERATION OLIGARCHICAL TENDENCIES?

André Duvenhage[1] and Jan Venter[2]

Abstract

The important question now is Where is the second transition (in other words the post-Polokwane epoch) taking South Africa? Is the country moving away from polyarchy and approaching "a type of hegemony" as part of a larger regime transition to a possible oligarchy? The ***terra incognita*** *of 2010 and further has to be explored urgently. With this in view a deductive theoretical model will indicate the direction of the second regime transition. Central concepts and structures to be included in this part of the article are complex systems, parties and party systems, as well as neopatrimonialism. The theoretical model will secondly be applied to the post-Polokwane South Africa.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The term regime transition describes the replacement of one governing administration by another. During the process of transition that might include violence, all or part of a state's existing institutions and administrative apparatus might be transformed or replaced. The ruling elite will however certainly be replaced. The first government change with characteristics of a regime transition in South Africa[3] (since 1910) was formalised in 1994. The National Party (NP) ceded power to the democratically elected ANC government and the miracle of the rainbow nation with Mandela as president was born without serious violence, so that hope abounded for the future.

At the 2007 Polokwane Conference of the ANC the Mbeki elite ("class of 1996 project") was defeated and replaced by "the coalition of the dissatisfied", the outsiders, the people neglected by the Mbeki programme which led to the consolidation of ANC power (Luthuli House) at the expense of the regime and state (Union Buildings and the Constitution)[4] on the basis of re-emphasising the

1 Professor and Research Director, Focus Area 7.2 Sustainable Social Development, North-West University. E-mail: andre.duvenhage@nwu.ac.za

2 School for Social and Governmental Studies, North-West University. E-mail: 10214844@nwu.ac.za

3 Compare Venter & Duvenhage (2008:625-650), *The Polokwane Conference and South Africa's second political transition tentative conclusions on future perspectives*.

4 Andrew Feinstein (2008:255) describes this erosion of the powers of the state as follows: "…as I experienced at first hand, the independence and vigour of key institutions of state and society, including parliament are undermined". Pottinger (2008) describes the same phenomenon: During the period after 1997 Parliament entered a period of "degradation" (Galland as quoted by

ideology referred to as the National Democratic Revolution (NDR)[5] (Pottinger 2008:14). This ideology, amongst other factors, is preparing the way for dominant or perhaps even hegemonic party rule by facilitating the emergence of a dominant new political elite with its roots in the struggle for the liberation from apartheid and the political struggle against Mbeki.

This second government transition has very little in common with the euphoric first transition of the nineties. In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "We naively thought struggle attributes such as altruism were transferable, but sadly this is not the case, as seen by the high levels of corruption that have plagued us since we gained our democracy. Poverty, health issues such as HIV and AIDS, inadequate service delivery and lack of balanced discourse" are some of the issues that would worry Mandela (*Mail & Guardian* 2010:1).

As calls for the nationalisation of mines are being discussed by the ANC, foreign journalists are thrown out of news conferences for having "white tendencies", songs are sung exhorting one population group to kill another, "tenderpreneurs" (reflecting corruption) proliferate, the economy sways under perpetual mass action and crime escalates. Many now mourn the seemingly defunct rainbow nation with Mandela and Tutu.

Add to this the fact that the Constitution allows for the supremacy of the power of the party bosses, thereby supporting the definition of a "dominant party system" and so facilitating possible hegemonic tendencies. The electoral system on the national level in South Africa is a pure representational list system, which allows party leaders to choose, expel and switch list members in and out of Parliament at will. The result is that only parties are represented and only their bosses are of consequence (Johnson 2009:13). The fundamental question now is where the second transition is taking South Africa? Is the country moving away from "polyarchy" towards a "form of hegemony" as part of a more comprehensive regime change towards possible oligarchy? The *terra incognita* of 2010 and beyond needs to be defined as a matter of urgency.

In order to do this, this article will firstly use a deductive theoretical model to indicate the direction of the second regime transition (the post-Polokwane epoch)[6]. Central concepts and structures included in this part of the article will be complex systems, parties and party systems, and neopatrimonialism. This theoretical model

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Pottinger, 2008:44). This under a "rampant Mbeki ascendancy" led to a weakening of its capacity to oversee government (Pottinger 2008:44).

5 This continued struggle is defined through the NDR as "a process of struggle that seeks to transfer power to the people and transform society into a non-racial, non-sexist, united, democratic one, and changes the manner in which wealth is shared, in order to benefit all the people" (ANC 2007: 21).

6 Compare Venter & Duvenhage (2008:625-650), *The Polokwane Conference and South Africa's second political transition tentative conclusions on future perspectives*.

will then secondly be operationalised in the post-Polokwane South Africa, the era of the second transition.

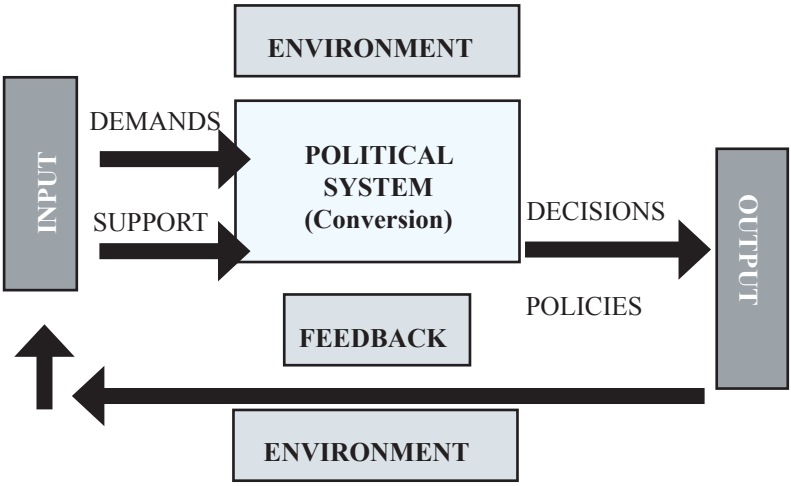
2. THEORETICAL MODEL AND POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Three aspects are important in this regard: complex systems theory as macro-framework and point of departure, parties and party systems, on the one hand, and neopatrimonial tendencies on the other. The following theoretical context will provide a conceptual point of reference from which the current state of the South African political system and related dynamics can be contextualised, starting with complex systems.

2.1 Complex systems theory as point of departure

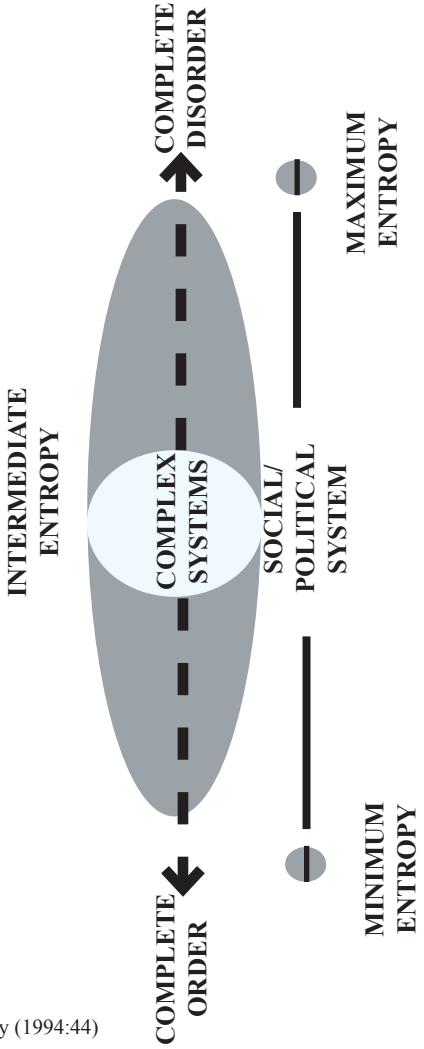
According to Bailey (1994:44), a system is a "bounded set of interrelated components that has an entropic (system stress or negative energy) value below the maximum". A typical example of such a system is the model of David Easton, depicted below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Easton's Model



Easton's model, emphasising order, structure and equilibrium (compare David Easton's *The political system – an inquiry into the state of political science* [1953]), would fit into the middle of the scale adapted from Bailey (1994:45) in Figure 2 below, stemming as it does from classical non-responsive, unchanging systems theory. Systems theory emphasises stability and equilibrium, while complex systems theory emphasises instability, entropy, dynamic equilibrium and disequilibrium.

Figure 2: Complex systems theory and entropy



Adapted from Bailey (1994:44)

When non-equilibrium approaches are included in analyses, a system can be described as more complex. In this regard Merkl (1977: xvii-xviii) *inter alia* states: "It is very important that the comparative study of politics does not permit itself to be locked exclusively into a stability orientated systems framework. Just as the actual systems are capable of changing back and forth from stable order to revolutionary transformations, the conceptual framework of the political scientist has to be able to accommodate all the varieties of political reality." Thus it becomes necessary to define a complex system as advocated by Merkl (1977) in contrast to a simple system (especially when the complexity of South African politics in the post-Polokwane epoch needs to be addressed).

"Complex systems consist of many diverse and autonomous but interrelated and interdependent components or parts linked through many (dense) interconnections [which might themselves be complex in their own right]. Complex systems cannot be described by a single rule and their characteristics are not reducible to one level of description. They exhibit properties that emerge from the interaction of their parts and which cannot be predicted from the properties of the parts" (Businessdirectory, online).

This definition of a system allows for change, flexibility, dynamic equilibrium and even unpredictability on many levels. This is the essence of a complex system. According to complex systems theory, a political system can oscillate between minimum and maximum entropy. Entropy is defined as "the quantitative measure of disorder in a system" (*Physics*, online) and "a process of degradation or running down or a trend to disorder" (Merriam-Webster 2010, online). Entropy is a constant in a system and only through the addition of energy can the natural process of degradation be stayed and eventually reversed into evolution. Evolution is not the natural process – it occurs at huge cost of deliberate energy spending that equals and surmounts the levels of entropy in a system.

Bailey (2004:5) refers to the addition of energy as "life support systems". Life support systems involve the reallocation of positive energy from the outside environment. In the political reality they can be economic, military or political, or take the form of assistance, knowledge or the addition of skills. If there are no (effective) life support systems "every living system would continually increase in entropy until it reached maximum entropy" which "represents, almost by definition, the death of the system and thus the failure of the system to achieve sustainability".

"Logical entropy" being distinguishable from "thermodynamic entropy" in "living systems theory", and being the most applicable with complex (social/political) systems, means "disorganisation and disorder". In a system without maintenance (energy or life support) "without someone to fix it, a broken glass never mends. Without management, a business fails, without new software, a computer never acquires new capabilities. *Never*" (Klyce 1996:1).

From the flexible perspective of complex systems the methodological advantage that Merkl advocates can be transferred into the study of South African politics at this present stage in the country's history where a government transition is beginning to look like a regime transition with possible implications for polyarchic versus hegemonic tendencies.

To summarise:

- In order to accurately portray political reality in the post-Polokwane epoch, complex systems theory provides a responsive and flexible toolset for the understanding of the complexity of change and unpredictability.
- Within complex systems, entropy is the dominant force (not evolution) and energy expenditure is required for system maintenance and evolution.
- Life support systems (external support) such as funds, policy or system deviations can mitigate entropy (extend life) with various degrees of effectiveness and efficiency.
- An example of a life support system is provided by forms of praetorian intervention where the military or quasi-military is co-opted into a system to force order into that system.
- The higher the level of entropy in the system, the higher the level of disorder, and the higher the level of energy required to repair and maintain the system and, eventually, to evolve (compare Klyce 1996:1-14; Bailey 1994:219-251; & Bailey 2004:1-18).

The following subjects selected for attention are system elements that are extremely important within the complex nature of the South African political system, especially within the context described earlier. Areas/focal points reflecting the complicated nature of the South African political environment include the party and party system and patrimonial and neopatrimonial tendencies. Although not the only dynamic components of this complex system, both are crucial to the understanding of regime transition in South Africa and what can be referred to as liberational oligarchical tendencies in South African politics in the post-Polokwane epoch.

2.2 Parties and party systems

In the first place, political parties (described by Sartori [1976:3-25] as functional agencies, part of a pluralistic whole [reality] and channels of expression and representation) seek to win political power and to exercise that power (Duverger 1955:xxiii). According to La Palombara and Weiner (1966:3), "the political party emerges whenever the activities of a political system reach a certain level of complexity, or whenever the notion of political power comes to include the idea that

the mass public must participate or be controlled". Sartori (1976:63) thus defines political parties as "a political grouping identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through (free or non-free) election candidates for public office".

Parties in democracies have two central purposes: firstly to gain power by winning elections; and, secondly, once they are in power, to implement their public policy. This public policy is a general set of ideas or plans that has been officially agreed on and which are used as a basis for making decisions (Duverger 1955:xxiii-xxiv; Newton & Van Deth 2005:222; Sartori 1976:3-29 & 63).

In this respect the ANC as a "revolutionary" party embarked on the path of transformation from being a liberation movement to being a political party, emphasising the National Democratic Revolution as ideology and focusing on comprehensive social, political and economic change with the party as the vanguard in this process.

Political parties operate within party systems (the "whole" that Sartori [1976:25] refers to) which are patterns of significant parties within a more comprehensive political system (Newton & Van Deth 2005:224). Sartori (1976:44 and 72) differentiates between an interparty and an intraparty system. According to Sartori, a political party is a miniature political system on the intraparty (inside) level. All political parties together form the interparty (between several) or larger party system within the political system.

A political system[7] is a system in which political demands and support are converted into political decisions and policy (Mclean & MacMillan 2003:530 and compare David Easton, *The political system – an inquiry into the state of political science* [1953]). As such, a political system is a structural functional model designed to explain political survival, political maintenance, political decay and collapse (Bealey 2003:260).

The manner and modes of the coexistence of different parties in the political system form the party system (Duverger 1955:203). To classify party systems Sartori (1976:125) suggests that numerical criteria (the method used by Ostrogorski, Duverger and Blondel) are not fully sufficient for the understanding of the nature of party systems. According to Sartori (1976:xi), the major criterion for the classification of party systems is the level of competition within the party system. "Competitive politics is conditioned not only by the presence of more than one party, but also by a minimum of fair competition … below which a political market can hardly perform as a competitive market" (Sartori 1976:140). The argument resulting from this is that the level to which political systems

7 The systems concept and systems theory as a whole are very broad and often combined with structural functionalism (amongst others). Compare the works of David Easton (already referenced) and Almond (1988), *Separate tables schools and sects in political science*.

institutionalise and tolerate competition and competitiveness, forms a natural typology. If parties are not allowed by the system or by other parties to compete, the system becomes authoritarian and thus less democratic.[8] The link between competition and democracy is stated even more directly by Schumpeter (1942:269): "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of competition for the people's vote." This adds weight to the classification criteria of Bratton and Van de Walle (1998:78) which build on the perspectives of Robert Dahl (1971). Competition exists in order to mobilise support from a participatory base. The lower the participatory level within the system, the less democratic (competitive-pluralistic) and the more authoritarian (hegemonic) it is likely to be.

A form of hegemony[9]/authoritarianism that is important in the South African situation, according to Bratton and Van de Walle (1998:78), Sartori (1976) and Schumpeter (1942), is oligarchy. Oligarchy is defined by Bealey (2003:30) as governance by an elite group "who in some way are superior to the rest of the community. The superiority may rest upon social status, intellectual brilliance, the possession of great wealth, or a position of superordination." According to Duverger (1955:2), this elite steps out of the purely political domain "to invade the fields of economics, society, the family, and so on".

Ball (1993:91), acknowledging the complexity of the subject as described above by Sartori and others, uses the following criteria to classify party systems: 1) number of parties; 2) the relative strength of parties; 3) the ideological difference between parties; and 4) the structure of the party. The following classification may be drawn up: one-party systems (Cuba, China and North Korea); dominant party systems (India, Japan); distinct two-party systems (New Zealand); indistinct two-party systems (United States); two and one half party systems; stable multiparty systems; and unstable multiparty systems (also compare Ball 1993:91). The system most relevant to the subject of this article is the dominant party system**,** in view of the total domination of the political system in South Africa by the ANC since 1994 (as evident in the results of all the national elections since 1994, including the 2009 general election).

Dominant party systems differ from a one-party system in that a party can become so dominant in a multiparty environment that an election victory is considered a formality. This is the case in South Africa as has been best illustrated in the recent 2009 general elections where the ANC obtained 65,89% of the votes.

8 Sartori (1976:283) uses the terms "monocentrism" and "pluralism" to carry his argument further. The full explanation of Sartori's text does not fall within the purview of this article.

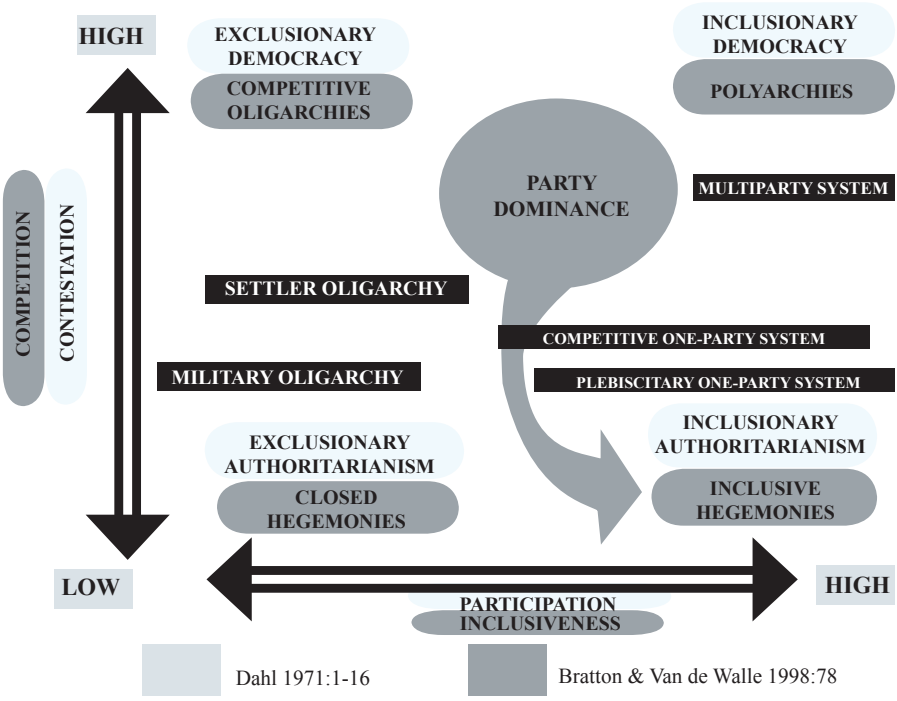
9 For Dahl (1971:7) an oligarchy with limited public contestation is a "closed hegemony". Hegemony carries the meaning of the ascendency or domination of one element of a system over other components of the same system.

Other examples are India and the Indian Congress Party; Italy and the Christian Democratic Party; Sweden and the Social Democratic Party; and then the National Party rule in South Africa from 1948-1994[10].

At this point Gentilli (2005:31) offers another valuable distinction. Even a dominant party system as defined above is not necessarily hegemonic. In a dominant party system, change of government is still possible, while in a hegemonic system (which is malignant and antidemocratic according to Western political thought) the party in control starts to monitor other parties to such an extent that those parties cannot be termed competitors and change of government becomes impossible, except via a total regime change. Sartori (1976:127) describes a hegemonic party as one that permits the existence of other parties only as subordinates, in what Robert Dahl (1971:7) refers to as a "closed hegemony".

The implications of dominant and hegemonic forces in a political system are illustrated in the following diagram:

Figure 3: The impact of party dominance and its outcome within the general theoretical framework

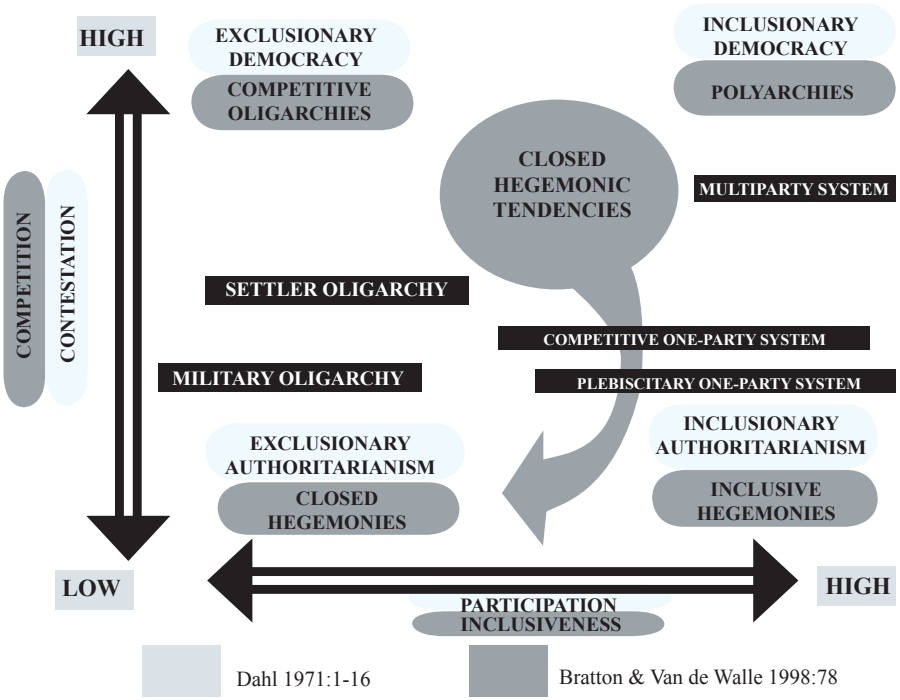


10 During this period South Africa was only a limited democracy, described by Bratton and Van de Walle (1998:78) as a "settler oligarchy".

As can be seen in a dominant system, levels of participation remain high. Levels of competition, however, decrease dramatically. In terms of Dahl/Bratton and Van de Walle's model the party system moves towards inclusionary authoritarianism or closed hegemony.

In contrast, the implications of hegemonic tendencies can be illustrated in the following diagram:

Figure 4: The impact of hegemonic party tendencies



From the illustration above it is clear that both participation and competition decrease due to hegemonic forces, leading to an exclusionary authoritarian dictatorship.

The party system, characterised by dominant forces, was highly applicable to South Africa before 1994 (Heribert Adam called South Africa a settler oligarchy).[11] This trend continued after the 1994 transition, although having entered a new phase since the Polokwane Conference of the ANC and the so-called "second transition". The following are characteristics of dominant party systems:

11 Compare Adam (1971), *Modernizing racial domination – South Africa's political dynamics*.

- One party dominates all others: for example the Congress Party of India and the Liberal Party of Japan (Newton & Van Deth 2005:227). In Africa, one-party systems dominated the post-colonial era, with the party in question more often than not being a former liberation movement.
- In a dominant party system there is no viable alternative to the dominant party in the short and medium term.
- The dominant party, despite a multiparty environment, is in control to such an extent that (1) it directs the political system as well as (2) state power over a long period of time so that (3) opposition parties can be seen as being irrelevant (Brooks 2004:2).
- In the situation as described above political parties from revolutionary stock (Uhuru-parties or former liberation organisations) tend to be very intolerant towards other groupings which do not follow the "national programme".
- Duverger's Law provides some insight into this phenomenon: 1) Non-proportional elections usually discriminate against small parties because they fail to turn their votes into a proportional number of seats; 2) the electorate knows this, and is less inclined to vote for small parties because it may be a wasted vote (Duverger 1955:248; Newton & Van Deth 2005:233).
- One-party dominance becomes undemocratic or possibly hegemonic when the governing party sees a lesser need to respond to public opinion. As the winning party in a dominant party system becomes the government, all other parties become the opposition (Newton & Van Deth 2005:235).
- The dominant party comes to represent the nation and democracy while the opposition, which is of cardinal importance in a democracy (Giliomee & Simkins [eds] 1999:340) can be depicted as opposing the national project however defined (Brooks 2004:4), thus making the opposition "non-nationalistic" and "a force against democracy".
- The dominant party becomes complacent.
- The distinction between the party and the state becomes increasingly unclear.
- Senior state officials and loyal businessmen are rewarded by the party.
- The opposition is in disarray and unable to change the dominant order (Brooks 2004:4; Newton & Van Deth 2005:228; Duverger 1955:248).

A dominant political party, as described above, becomes a *de facto* political elite, a group which is in some way superior to the rest of the community. This is the

essence of oligarchy as defined by Michels (1959:21) and Duverger (1955:4), signifying governance by a small organised minority or elite.[12]

To summarise:

- For purposes of understanding the macrodynamics of the South African political system, the role of parties and their related interaction within the party system (an important subsystem) is critical.
- The nature of party competition (intra or inter) defines the way the party system (multi, dominant, hegemonic) functions, directing the political system in terms of the patterns defined by the categories of Dahl, Bratton and Van de Walle.
- Oligarchical tendencies are tendencies away from polyarchy towards either competitive oligarchies/exclusionary democracies or closed hegemonies/ exclusionary authoritarianism.
- According to the macrotheoretical framework, South African politics may theoretically change towards a closed hegemony/exclusionary authoritarianism; inclusive hegemony/inclusionary authoritarianism; competitive oligarchy/exclusionary democracy or polyarchy/inclusionary democracy.

To add further perspective to the complex nature of the South African political system and related oligarchical tendencies an outline of the nature and practice of neopatrimonial tendencies is of the utmost importance. The understanding of these tendencies will help to explain the foundation of what can be described as a liberation oligarchy.

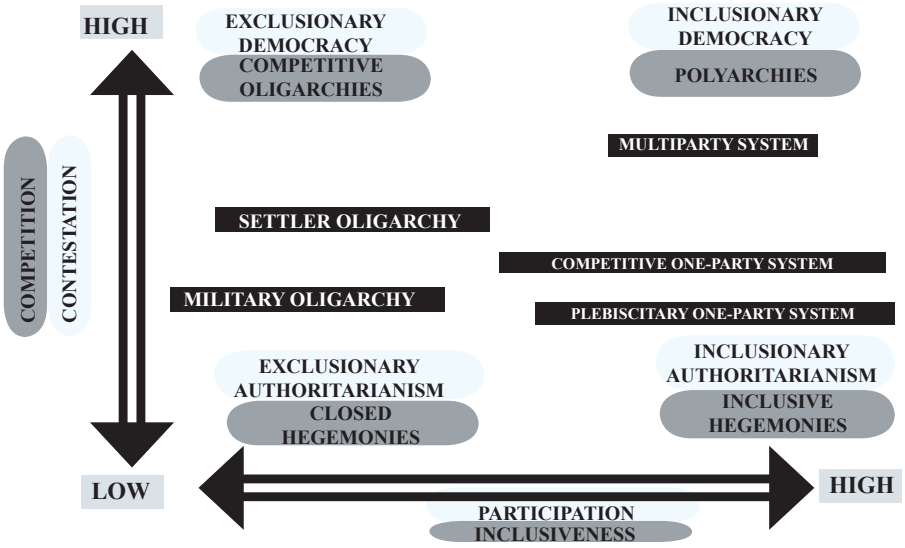
2.3 The patrimonial and neopatrimonial complexity and related tendencies

The types of regimes identified by Bratton and Van de Walle (1998:78-82) in Figure 5, below, are all forms of neopatrimonial rule.[13]

12 In a dominant party system there exist elites within elites. On the interparty (party system) level the dominant party is an elite grouping, while on the intraparty level an organisational elite manages the party (Sartori 1976:71).

13 These regimes according to Figure 1 are: The plebiscitary one-party system allowing limited competition and high participation. The military oligarchy is exclusionary while the competitive one-party system allows more competition. Settler oligarchies are exclusionary democratic where a part of society have access to the democratic process while multiparty systems have high levels of participation and competition.

Figure 5: Neopatrimonialist regimes in Africa



Party systems/regime types according to Bratton and Van de Walle 1998:78

Patrimonialism is the concentration of power in the personal authority of the leader, while Western regime logic focuses on the supremacy of institutions as illustrated by the belief in the *trias politica* (Thompson 2003:107; Bratton & Van de Walle 1998:61). In opposition to this, patrimonial leaders treat all political concerns of the state as their own personal affair, thus the state is (becoming?) private property (Thompson 2003:107).

A neopatrimonial system is a hybrid political system "in which the customs and patterns of patrimonialism co-exist with, and suffuse, rational-legal institutions" (Bratton & Van de Walle 1998:62). Table 1 illustrates the difference between rational-legal institutions or Western regime logic and patrimonialism.

It is important to differentiate between Western state regime logic and patrimonial regime logic. The conflict between these two logics can be described as a fundamental conflict of opposing value systems. The former was brought to Africa by colonialism and forms a part of the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. Patrimonialism, on the other hand, has its roots in the big-man or strong-man politics that became characteristic of post-colonial Africa (Thompson 2003:107). Table 1 illustrates the difference between Western state regime logic and patrimonial regime logic presented as a dichotomy:

Table 1: Dichotomy between Western and patrimonial regime logic (Duvenhage 2007:19)

Western state regime logic	Patrimonial regime logic
Institutions and structures of state are more important than individuals and groups.	Individual and individual group priorities are more important than institutional priorities.
Bureaucracies and organs of state are functional and aimed at service delivery.	Bureaucracies are client-orientated and sometimes dysfunctional.
A clear division exists between the state sector and civil society.	An intermingling of state and civil society.
The existence of democratic governing principles.	The existence of non-democratic or mixed governing principles.
The citizenry are all equal before the state and the law.	Differentiation between support bases within the government.
Characteristics of a strong state predominate.	Characteristics of soft, weak and imploded states sometimes predominate.
Government instability is not necessarily equal to regime and state instability.	Government instability leads to regime and state instability.
Priority order: State, government, party, interest group.	Priority order: Interest group, party, government, state.

Neopatrimonialism is the intertwining and fusion (synergy) of these two sets of characteristics producing a form of personal rule (Thompson 2003:107). This fusion is situational and example specific, in other words, no two neo-patrimonial regimes will necessarily be the same. According to Bratton and Van de Walle (1998), African politics should be seen as a fusion (synergy) between patrimonialism and legal rational (Western) institutions. This is evident in the countries such as Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Lesotho, Nigeria, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi (Bratton and Van de Walle 1998:79). Private interests are pursued within a political structure that has a legal/rational façade. Post-colonial Africa has been dominated by personal rule/patrimonialism which encourages competition among intragovernmental factions (Thompson 2003:110).

Neopatrimonialist regimes need sources of legitimacy that include violence (as life support system), which feeds the root of counterviolence. Therefore the

skilful personal ruler uses a combination of coercion and legitimacy[14] to maintain governmental and social order. The roots of a military oligarchy are found here. Personal rulers rely on the distribution of state resources to buy legitimacy for their regimes. As long as patrons can nourish their followers through the manipulation of public goods and institutions, with the use of praetorian measures (i.e. the military, [Huntington 2006:195]), they are safe. Ethiopia, Somalia and Zimbabwe can serve as extreme examples where, as a result, neopatrimonialism as the political system imploded. This resulted in political decay and the rule of the warlords made infamous by the disastrous American intervention in Somalia in 1993, chronicled by Mark Bowden (1999:30) in his book *Black hawk down*.

Reward for clients distributed through the mechanism of clientelism becomes the substitute for legitimacy (Thompson 2003:111). Clientelism is a relation of exchange between unequals. It is a mutually beneficial association between the powerful and the weak. A patron extends public office (a salary and access to the state), security and recourses to his clients.

Clientelism forms part of a bigger socio-political framework, which is related to what can be regarded as a form of praetorianism. Huntington (1965:146) describes praetorianism in the following terms: "(A) society which lacks law, authority, cohesion and discipline and consensus, where private interests dominate public ones, where in short political institutions are weak and social forces strong." The military involvement (sometimes military participation) in politics within the abovementioned framework may take on many forms.[15]

The primary agent of state coercion is the military or quasi-military. The intervention of the military in politics (compare Huntington 1968:1-8, 8-32, 72-78, 198-237) along with patrimonialism and clientelism can be viewed as symptoms of political decay measured against the backdrop of Western legal-rational perspectives or criteria for political institutionalisation.[16] An extreme example of this is the Zimbabwe crisis where system decay is becoming a prominent phenomenon.

The essential background of political decay is a distinction that Huntington (1968:1) offers, based on the differences between countries with regard to their degree of government as measured in the government's ability to provide security and stability. According to Huntington (1968:1-8), states with high degrees of

14 This corresponds to Duverger's (1955:151) dual nature of organisations where the organisation has a democratic veneer but remains at its heart oligarchic.

15 Compare Perlmutter (1969:382-404) for the nature of praetorian politics and the related forms of military involvement in politics: for example Juan Peron as a populist reformer in Argentina (1945-1955); Abdul Nasser in Egypt (1952-1970) as a non-radical reformer; and Mustafa Kemalin in Turkey (1919-1923) as a non-traditional, republican and reform-orientated praetorian leader.

16 Praetorianism can be seen as the result of instability in the system and elite network frustrations resulting in forms of militarisation paving the way for more extreme and direct military intervention.

government are characterised by effective political institutions, well-organised political parties, broad participation, adaptable political institutions, civilian control over the army and effective methods of conflict mitigation. According to Huntington, these characteristics are absent in most developing countries. As mentioned above, patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism supplant high degrees of government which lead to patterns of political decay that start occurring when political institutions can no longer cope with or regulate political participation and security and stability atrophies.[17] Patrimonialism, praetorian related phenomena and clientelism are all forces that seek legitimacy for weak states or government in the absence of, and while eroding, the legal-rational institutions of government, supplanting them with neopatrimonialist (non)-institutions.

To summarise:

- Trying to understand the South African political dynamic by focusing only on structural (systems) features as a theoretical point of departure is insufficient.
- Patrimonial and neopatrimonial networks and their related impact on elite networks (contributing to frustrations and conflict on both party, party system and regime level) are of critical importance in attempting to understand systems transformation or "de-transformation" (decay).
- As a result of patrimonial and neopatrimonial realities patron-client relationships provide the basis for corruption and nepotism contributing to competition, conflict and violence for control of regime resources.
- In extreme cases of political and institutional decay, patrimonial and neo-patrimonial networks may reorganise themselves using state assets and resources, thereby paving the way for patterns of violent conflict and even praetorian practices (forms of military involvement) and warlordism (civil war).

To sum up, this theoretical point of departure accepts that the political (regime?) transformation in South Africa must be studied from a complex system perspective where the extremes on the spectrum of change are represented by maximum entropy (minimum order) and minimum entropy (maximum order). With the use of the matrix (reference figures 2 to 4) where political participation and competition are used as variables, the direction of the transformation process (closed hegemony or open hegemony) can be plotted. Apart from the direction of transformation, additional information can be derived and plotted from patrimonial and neopatrimonial regime

17 It is important to note that the mere occurrence of political decay or its symptoms does not mean the end of democracy; it merely signifies that the state is weakening and in extreme cases, situations can occur similar to those of Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Somalia and others. These are worst case scenarios.

frameworks as to the content of the process of transformation after the Polokwane Conference. These frameworks help to identify different and conflicting regime logics, elite networks and to better understand conflict and regime reaction to patterns of political decay (entropy), for example praetorianism.

With the use of the above framework, the course of change away from polyarchy towards liberation oligarchy in the post-Polokwane era will now be contemplated.

3. CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS: APPLICATION OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

For the purpose of this section of the article the findings of the theoretical framework will be integrated and applied to the current South African political environment. In this manner theory will be applied to reality and an accurate plot will be constructed as to the direction South Africa has taken politically since the Polokwane Conference.

The main points of the theoretical framework that will be taken further are:

- Complex systems as a flexible toolset;
- complex systems, entropy, system maintenance (life support systems) and deflection;
- network politics (patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism) and oligarchical tendencies;
- inclusive hegemony versus closed hegemony; and
- liberation oligarchical tendencies.

3.1 Complex systems as a flexible toolset

The post-Polokwane environment as a phase in South African politics can best be analysed by using complex systems theory as a point of departure. Uncertainty over the direction of the regime transition and the impact of strong influences that as yet cannot be measured, define the necessity for this toolset. Possible outcomes during this uncertain post-Polokwane epoch include: the consolidation of polyarchy; development towards closed or open hegemony; the development of praetorianistic practices and patterns of political decay.

Core aspects that define the direction and contents of the regime change are the party and party system as well as the patrimonial and neopatrimonial tendencies. Where the first mentioned relates to the relationship between the state and the party, patrimonialism describes the elite contest seen at Polokwane between the neoliberal Mbeki elite versus the Zuma “coalition of the aggrieved”.

3.2 Complex systems, entropy, system maintenance (life support systems) and deflection

Entropy refers to the level of order versus chaos in a system where the maximum level of entropy equates to the maximum level of chaos and disorder. Thus higher levels of entropy contribute to unpredictability, necessitate higher levels of system maintenance, and in some cases extra systems (life support) need to be added to maintain the basic system. High levels of entropy in the South African system can, amongst others, be seen in the following:

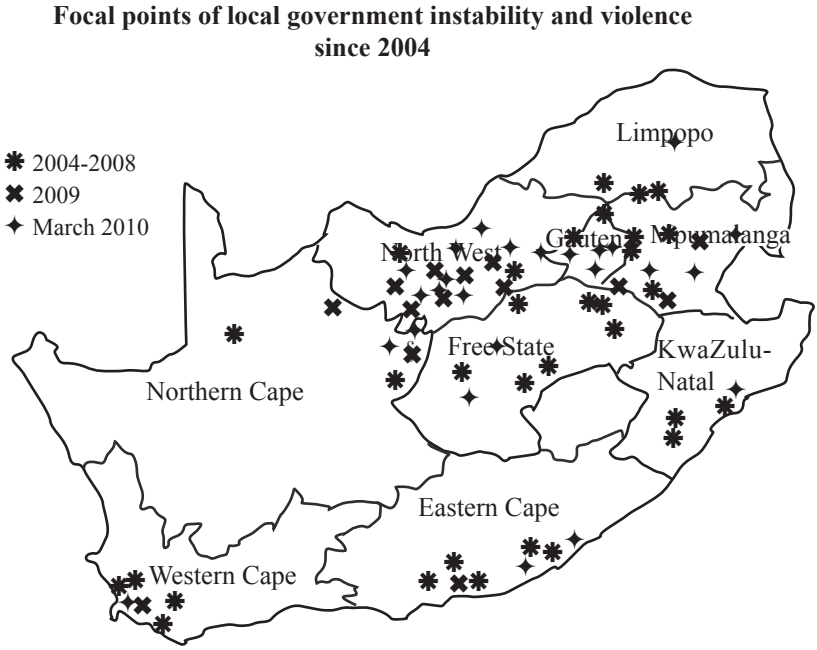
The weakening of state institutions described by Pottinger (2008:44) as leading "to the slow but inevitable decline in its (parliament's) capacity to exercise oversight". Feinstein (2007:8) describes how he personally experienced how the independence and vigour of key institutions, including Parliament, were being undermined. This could be seen by all during the arms scandal, "Oilgate" and with dealings concerning dysfunctional state departments and semistate institutions such as ESKOM, the SABC and local and provincial government.

Local government collapse has reached epidemic proportions. As early as 2006 out of 284 municipalities, 203 could not provide sanitation for 60% of their households; 155 could not provide water to 80% of their municipal properties; 182 could not provide refuse removal for 60% of their households; 122 could not provide adequate housing; 42 were unable to meet 50% of their obligations and 136 were to receive assistance under Project Consolidate[18] (Duvenhage & Venter 2009:23). Project Consolidate whereby local governments (a supposedly sovereign system) receive external aid is an excellent example of an entropically dominant system that receives life support**,** thereby transferring system stress. When a system cannot be resuscitated, or piggy-backed by life support, system deflection occurs. This can happen along two lines, negative or positive. A positive system deflection is the placement of a non-governmental system (sometimes) performing governmental functions within the law (even though government may not like the idea), for example private schools, private security, ratepayers' associations and civil rights groups. Examples of such groups are (amongst others) the 280 ratepayers' associations that, according to Minister Sicelo Shiceka, "have created a parallel government" (SAPA 2010a:1). A negative system deflection is the placement of sometimes unlawful structures outside the law performing actions that mostly benefit the members of such a structure. Examples of these sometimes subversive groups are PAGAD, Mapogo and "Die Boeremag" (Dempster 2001:1). (Xenophobia and vigilantism are also relevant here, but will be dealt with later.)

18 Project Consolidate is a project of central government to support and strengthen local government and to ensure effective performance of duties.

Service delivery protests, in light of the figures mentioned above, have duly escalated. People do not have access to basic services after 16 years of democracy. Thokaza, Diepsloot, Orange Farm, with a myriad of new settlements, both formal and informal, also needing infrastructure, seem to form a recurring problem without a solution.

Figure 6: Services delivery protests



Updated from Duvenhage & Venter 2009:25

Figure 6 above shows the density of and the relative increase in service delivery protests.

3.3 Network politics

Network politics, "tenderpreneurs" and corruption can be blamed for much of what is chronicled above. Johnson (2009:13) describes how with the new ANC government a new class of opportunistic patron[19] was born building corrupt relations. According to Johnson, some of these people were the Kebbles and the Shaiks and this led to a scramble for patronage (Pottinger 2008:250), resulting

19 In most cases these patrons were the same that months and weeks before still had paintings of National Party leaders in their offices (compare Johnson 2009).

in network politics on not just the level of personal wealth, but also on the larger ideological scale (more about this later). On another scale an internal report of the ANC describes how the North West Province was looted by various factions in the provincial government structures (compare ANC [2009] task team report).

The result was that there was not the grand equalising effect on the socio-economic fabric and the populace that the ANC wanted. Instead the most unequal society in the world came into being (Pressly 2009:33). "In the long run it (the widest gap between rich and poor in the world) is bad for growth. It is a threat to social stability and to growth itself" (Bhorat as quoted by Pressly 2009:33). Along with the unequal distribution of wealth, crime has risen alarmingly. South Africa is now reported as the most dangerous country in the world where a war is not raging, with the second highest murder rate behind Colombia (Nationmaster 2010:1).

The incidence of vigilantism, "do it yourself" or mob justice, is then concurrently also rising, along with incidents of xenophobia. These last two phenomena are indicators of the existence of a fringe where government does not reach, in other words the system there has already stopped functioning and has been supplanted by the law of jungle systems.

The facts stated above are an indication of a complex system with high levels of endemic entropy (disorder and instability) and negative energy. Intervention is necessary to try and stabilise these systems especially on local and provincial level. This support seems to be allocated in a patrimonial manner leading to the centralisation of power in the party within a state that seems to be exhibiting more and more dominant and even hegemonic tendencies.

3.4 Inclusive hegemony versus closed hegemony

It is clear that the South African system became a dominant party system after the 1994 election. The ANC and its partners dominate politics inside and outside of Parliament. What has also become clear is that the ANC does not tolerate opposition, it wants to be hegemonic. It co-opted the NP, the Freedom Front Plus (FF+) and tried to do so with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and AZAPO (Feinstein 2008:31). It wants to "purge" the DA (Malema as quoted by SAPA 2008:1) and kill Shilowa and Lekota (SAPA 2008:1). Although these last examples might be purely rhetorical, deeper analysis also points to the hegemonic nature of ANC politics.

- According to Pottinger (2008:13), Mbeki's long-term objective was not a democratic one but rather the "creation of a one-party state run by the ANC".
- Feinstein (2008:3) further protests the ANC's unwillingness to listen to minority parties, progressive non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and ordinary people.

- Johnson (2009:599) remarks that South Africa is led by a government whose ideal model is Cuba, "under pressure from a left of centre opposition (or alliance partners?) that want to move further still in the direction of autarchy… and whose elite admire Hugo Chavez… one is looking at much the same sort of extreme African nationalism seen in Mugabe's Zimbabwe, whose own favoured model was North Korea". (We have already remarked on Julius Malema's visit to Zimbabwe; he has also sought advice from Chavez.)

Other features of the new hegemonic model include a very structured elite system. At Polokwane the Mbeki-elite were supplanted by the Zuma-elite. The party, against the background of the erosion of government, became the dominant oligarchic actor. The very term oligarchy, referring to the rule by a class or superior exclusive group, is undemocratic and hegemonic, especially if fair contestation for membership to that group is restricted. At Polokwane a major reaffirmation was made to the ideology of the NDR defined as "a process of struggle that seeks to transfer power to the people and transform society into a non-racial, non-sexist, united, democratic one, and changes the manner in which wealth is shared, in order to benefit all the people" (ANC 2007:21). The more radical, less neoliberal, interpretation of this ideology is the ideological breaking point that gives or denies access to the elite system. With this access comes, via neopatrimonialism, access to economic empowerment and corruption as was seen above and it is on this point that the tripartite alliance may be ripped apart. The corruption is threatening the ideology and the revolution that according to Nzimande (2006:1) never stopped and whose ultimate goal was and is socialism with 1994 just a breakthrough on the way. As this complex system generates non-productive (actually destructive) energy (itself a major source of entropy) militarisation or praetorianism starts occurring. Julius Malema orders the police to remove his political opponents (SAPA 2010b:1). MK cadres start reappearing, threatening to make the Western Cape ungovernable (*Mail & Guardian* 2010:1); far right-wing groups start reappearing and songs are sung encouraging killing. The question now is, according to the matrix offered in this article, what kind of dominant or hegemonic party is the ANC becoming?

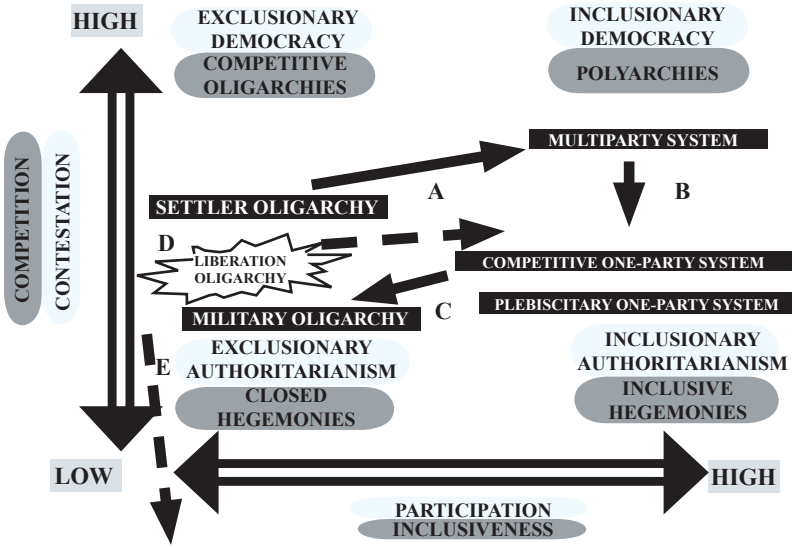
3.5 Liberation oligarchical tendencies

The first political transition in South Africa was momentous. It occurred in 1994 when apartheid was officially replaced by democracy. At that stage South Africa moved from a "settler oligarchy" to a "multiparty system". This change is indicated by "A" in Figure 7 below. In the elections since then, the ANC was the dominant party. This change from multiparty system to dominant party system is indicated by "B" in Figure 7 below.

The authors postulate that an even more subtle process of change, termed "The Second Transition" illustrated by "C" in Figure 7, started occurring through the vehicles of neopatrimonialism (compare Pottinger 2008:13-14), and clientelism supported by forms of praetorian interventions. This was not only the result of the Zuma/Mbeki feud. "Under the guise of what was called a national democratic revolution, Mbeki carefully and skilfully consolidated his power through the constitution and institutions of state. His objective was control of the political processes in South Africa, and he set out to eliminate or marginalise opposition." This resulted, by way of "C" in Figure 7, in a specific form of closed hegemony, a liberation oligarchy.

For the purpose of this article a liberation oligarchy can be defined as a complex socio-political system where a dominant party (with sometimes hegemonic tendencies) establishes itself as a form of political hegemony with a regime orientation embedded in a strong ideological framework. Lack of political competitiveness that coincides with undemocratic and hegemonic undertones as well as levels of intolerance (racially orientated) prepare the terrain for legitimising a "historical elite" ("bureaucadres") with convincing political and struggle credentials. Political contestation, conflict and sometimes violence (the praetorian use of state power and party militias) are the outcome of elite network frustrations contributing to patterns of political instability which take on the form of survival politics and – in extreme cases – military involvement.

Figure 7: Tendency towards a liberation oligarchy in South Africa



As the name implies, the "liberation oligarchy" is the government by "the few" (or the elite of the elite) of the liberation struggle. The factions within this elite garner support through neopatrimonial networks, maintain authority through religious adherence to an ideology, are intolerant towards institutional and/or ideological competition and are in some cases protected by praetorian or related measures.

This is reflected in:

- a dominant party system with growing hegemonic tendencies;
- regime-orientated interpenetration between party, government, regime and state;
- the establishment of a new class of "bureaucadres" with close connections to the Zuma-elite and related neopatrimonial network;
- a strong ideological orientation (the NDR) to legitimise the political elite and mobilise mass support;
- an elite-orientation where historical (struggle) credentials and related political networks (for example exiles, "inciles", "Robben Islanders", UDF/ MDM orientated groupings) provide an important source of power and legitimacy;
- politically tending towards non-competitiveness, related non-democratic tendencies and levels of intolerance; and
- the politics of survival and related tendencies like military involvement in politics (forms of praetorianism) becoming a feature of the political landscape. It may pave the way for practices associated with military oligarchical practices viewed in the extreme. Examples of this are military training for members of the intelligence community; unconventional MK support for party political goals like making the Western Cape ungovernable; and the use of intimidation and violence to obtain party political goals.

The worst-case scenario may result in military oligarchical (praetorian) tendencies as a reaction to forms of political and institutional decay. In the South African example, "the settlers" are now almost completely supplanted by the "freedom fighters". "Struggle credentials" and especially "second struggle" (against Mbeki) credentials are now of paramount importance for inclusion in the new elite, and if you do not possess these credentials you should buy them by sponsoring a veteran of the struggle. Johnson (2009:14-15) cites a couple of examples of such actions. "In many cases such émigrés would keep emitting pro-ANC noises all the way to the airport, though most began to keep their distance from the ANC as soon as their asset transfers had gone through."

The assessment contained in this article indicates real danger for the successful consolidation of democratic practices in a post-2009 election environment.

Dominant and sometimes hegemonic party tendencies, strong ideological orientations, neopatrimonial practices and, in the extreme, praetorian-related tendencies, are facilitating the way for so-called liberation oligarchical tendencies, as opposed to polyarchy and the consolidation of democratic practices. If liberation oligarchical patterns are not controlled properly it may pave the way for a closed hegemony with a stronger military orientation in reaction to forms of institutional and political decay – precisely the opposite of what Dahl had in mind with polyarchy.

4. EVALUATION

South Africa's second political (regime) transition since the end of apartheid is currently taking place in the complex, dynamic and unpredictable environment of the post-Polokwane epoch. A complex systems approach with the inclusion of system entropy forms the theoretical point of departure of this article. From this flows a specific conceptual framework that was represented graphically in order to better understand the complexities of the patterns of dynamic equilibrium within this time frame.

This theoretical point of departure is operationalised by the use of a competition-participation matrix to indicate the dynamic (direction) of the process of change. This direction can theoretically be towards oligarchy, hegemony (open or closed) or an oligarchy that allows competition. A scenario outside this matrix that stresses entropy is indicated as praetorian and accentuates patterns of institutional and political decay.

As further development of this theoretical framework, the content of the regime transition as part of a complex system, is defined by the nature of the party system (being dominant with hegemonic tendencies). Oligarchic tendencies and patterns of system entropy are motivated by the presence of patrimonial and neo-patrimonial tendencies that indicate conflicting regime logic - this being a prominent characteristic of African politics in the past and now also becoming more prominent in South African politics.

Central to the research is the question of whether the second regime transition is indicating a shift towards competing polyarchy, towards forms of hegemony or towards patterns of political and institutional decay. The important results of the research include the following:

- The post-Polokwane environment emphasises complexity, flexibility and even unpredictability which necessitate a specifically tailored conceptual framework.
- Regime transition in South Africa must adopt a theoretical perspective to be analysed and understood with the use of a complex systems perspective.

- System (regime) reaction to a changing political environment contributes to the institutionalisation of a dominant party system with hegemonic characteristics.
- Patrimonial and neopatrimonial tendencies in the post-Polokwane environment are preparing the way for oligarchical regime characteristics such as network politics, elitism, "bureaucratic cadres" and political hegemony.
- The current South African regime (from this theoretical perspective) shows characteristics of a competing oligarchy and a closed hegemony and can be classified as a liberation oligarchy.
- As systems entropy increases, regime components are becoming more and more reliant on what is termed "life support systems" (at least in some cases), preparing the way for interventionist and hegemonic tendencies.

A liberation oligarchy as outcome of the regime transition can be described as an elite grouping, consisting of the cadres of the former liberation movements, that governs the state in a dominant and even hegemonic way and where it is difficult to differentiate between party, faction (political network), government, regime, and state. It is apparent that South African politics is completing a historical circle, starting with what Heribert Adam called a settler oligarchy, moving along to what is described above as a liberation oligarchy.

The post-Polokwane environment has not yet stabilised and increasing levels of entropy can prepare the way for military-oligarchical tendencies as well as institutional and political decay that can lead to system implosion. This is the less likely scenario in the shorter term, but one that must be averted at all costs. Currently it looks as if the ideal of polyarchy as conceptualised by Dahl (amongst others) is being supplanted by oligarchical and hegemonic tendencies. This is in conflict with the successful consolidation of democracy in South Africa. The South African political system (regime) is currently confronted by huge challenges and action plans are needed to combat system entropy and consolidate democracy. In the words of Abraham Lincoln: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew."

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