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Kenya Research project by Robert M. Press [see: Press, Robert M. (2006) *Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Civil Liberties*. Aldershot, U. K.: Ashgate.]

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Interview conducted by Robert M. Press (bob.press@usm.edu; press.bob@gmail.com)

Interviewee: Peter Wanyande

Location of interview: University of Nairobi; Nairobi, Kenya

Date of interview: 2002

Transcription by Bob Press. BP = interviewer (Bob Press); W = respondent (Wanyande)

Professor Peter Wanyande was chairman of the Department of Political Science, University of Nairobi

BP (not taped: why did activists not gain more concessions from the state?)

W. You know, I wanted to ask you a question first. When you say they did not gain greater concessions, it implies that there was a list of things they wanted to gain and therefore you measure that against what they actually got and say they did not get more. That's the problem I have with this question. My general answer is simply this: that it has something to do with the determination by the state to resist demands by the activists. That is one. And related to that, of course, is the fact that the activists were acting from a position of weakness compared to the state. I mean the state had so many, so much resources, so much power, that compared to the activists, really, they could say 'yes' or 'no' and there was very little the activists could do. So that, in my view, perhaps, explains that.

BP In an authoritarian state, is the role of civil society likely to be limited to winning only a few concessions from the state, rather than more?

[context is key]

W. Well, it depends also on – the general answer is yes, they [civil society] are likely to gain very limited concessions from the state; you know, this is authoritarian. But I want to say that authoritarian states also operate within a particular context, social-economic context. Social, economic, and even political context. And this context differs from one state to another. And what I am therefore saying is that its depending on the context. One civil society in a particular context may gain more in an authoritarian state than another civil society in a different state. In other words, if you look at –

BP The key is context.

[Key: rural vs. urban population (civil society stronger in urban populations)]

W. The key is context. That's what I'm saying. If you look at Kenya, for example, and compare it to Zambia, for example, I think civil societies in Zambia were much more successful in getting government to concede to their demands than they were in Kenya. And that had a lot to do, of course, with the nature of Kenyan society. Ninety percent of Kenyans are rural, eight-five percent. The exact opposite is in Zambia; about ninety percent are urban. **An urban population is much more enlightened, much more conscious of their rights.**

BP Can be mobilized more.
W Can be mobilized more
BP Strikes

[State turns some against civil society activists]

W Strikes and so on, whereas in a rural society, people tend to be passive, tend to be, you know, subservient and so forth. And they are easier to manipulate. And the group that manipulates them the most is the state because of the pervasiveness of the state. So it can actually even get them, the population, against the civil society population that are making demands. [unclear]. So that's why I say context is very important.

BP State getting part of the people to turn against civil society.

W. To turn against civil society, yes; to turn against civil society

BP Just by brandishing them as dissidents.

[factor: degree of authoritarianism]

W Yeah. And again, we also need to take into account the degrees of authoritarianism. That is an issue. Some states are extremely authoritarian; others are, if you like, moderate authoritarian, and that kind of thing. So really, context is very important.

BP Mengistu was authoritarian; no comparison there [with Kenya].

W. Yeah. So we need – the general answer is yes, **they [civil society] are likely to get very limited concessions**, BUT, we must take the context into account. And there are various elements of the context that we need to zero in [on].

[institutional learning: a theory of Lawrence Dodd at University of Florida: civil society and state keep changing tactics]

BP Institutional learning. Does the state, in a sense, engage in a chess game in tactics to counter tactics by activists and are both sides learning as they go and getting better at that game? How does one side win; under what conditions?

W. This is a game they always play. I mean the state is always engaging civil society organizations in some kind of 'game' if you like. And of course they learn from each other. I think if you look at the way civil society has engaged the state in this country, they always change tactics.

BP Civil society?

W. Yeah. Changing tactics.

BP I've seen that.

W. And to me that is an indication they have learned something about the tactic of the state and therefore [are] saying: if we want to gain more, to get more gains, then we better have a different approach than what we had, and so on. So I think that's the way I look at it.

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