Résumé

K. Tunteng — Vers une théorie du parti unique en Afrique. En dépit de la prévalence des systèmes politiques à parti unique en Afrique, le phénomène reste assez peu étudié sur le plan théorique. Parmi les causes favorisantes il faut relever les tendances centrifuges (tribalisme v. nationalisme, etc.) manifestées après l'indépendance. Le parti, en tant qu'institution, ne se confond pas avec l'attitude pratique de l'élite politique ; il y a une certaine confusion entre stabilité institutionnelle et maintien d'une même équipe au pouvoir. Cette dernière exigence est génératrice de contradictions, la suppression totale de l'opposition menant à des conflits de fait au sein de l'élite politique. La possibilité d'intervention des masses est réduite à néant par une contradiction analogue. En fait les méthodes mêmes des partis uniques contredisent leurs objectifs officiels.

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Toward a Theory of One-Party Government in Africa

I

Perhaps, it would be appropriate to begin this essay with a disclaimer. While the objective is to outline suitable conditions for unipartyism, it does not necessarily imply approval of that form of government. Therefore, it should be viewed as a response to a phenomenon which has become widespread in Africa, and threatens to remain so for the foreseeable future. Faced with such situations, the political scientist has only one choice: to seek alternatives within which the best could be obtained from the prevailing order. That is the purpose of this essay. But before we embark on this task, it would be useful to raise a few general questions: Under what circumstances can a uniparty system enhance the prospects of order and political stability? What factors are responsible for the multiplicity of one-party governments in Africa? To what extent have the views of single party proponents been vindicated by political practice? We propose to pay particular attention to these questions.

An inquiry into the nature of one-party government would by necessity include an attempt to delineate the conditions for political order in Africa. This, however, does not preclude the possibility of extending some of the conclusions to other regions of the developing world. Granted that the focus is Africa, the uniformities in the countries of this region would, nevertheless, make such generalizations profitable. Yet this must be qualified by the fact that nowhere in the developing world has the one-party phenomenon been popularized to the same extent as in Africa.

Despite this fact, the attention devoted to this development has been far from encouraging. Thus more than ten years after the widespread adoption of the one-party system in Africa, we still do not know very much about the merits and weaknesses of that form of government. This limited interest may be attributed to the varied responses which its emergence evoked. While some scholars dismissed it as problematic and

1. Unipartyism is used here to denote either de jure or de facto one-party dominance, following James Coleman and Carl Rosberg, eds., Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa, Berkeley, Calif., 1964.
doubtful for research purposes, others embraced it as a welcomed development and promptly announced that it was a certain path to the establishment of liberal democracies in Africa. These contradictory pronouncements were inevitable. In the traditional studies on comparative government which were influenced largely by the ‘free world/totalitarian’ dichotomy, the number of parties was generally considered to be ‘a sound index to the character’ of that country’s rule. The claim that African one-party systems were a prelude to totalitarianism was most likely influenced by this attitude. In the same manner that hopeful expressions were based on no valid premises, this skepticism was equally unwarranted. Much more than preconceived assumptions, and the apparent belief that what politicians say is all we need to know, will be needed in order to enhance our understanding of African politics.

II

While the application of certain Western concepts to the study of African politics has contributed to the accumulation of a substantial quantity of irrelevant literature, it remains doubtful as to whether such concepts can be done away with entirely. What is needed, however, are generalizations that have relevance to the reality of African society. This has not often been the case. As Ali Mazrui has argued, theories of modernization and political development have tended to follow a traditional pattern: social Darwinism. In this vein, the attitude was that the former colonies would follow the same path as the West, with the latter still forging further. One of those who anticipated this development was David Apter. In an elaborate theory of political institutional transfer, he sketched the procedure through which Westminster parliamentary democracy was going to be transplanted to the then Gold Coast. Besides the formidable problems associated with the transfer of political institutions, the British never attempted this task, nor were the new Ghanaian leaders deeply committed to democratic tenets, except insofar as was necessary to facilitate the transfer of political authority.

This is not to suggest that African studies should be isolated from model building. On the contrary, relevant models can go a long way in enhancing our understanding of events in that continent. Yet this suggestion may be countered by the question whether the social sciences

5. One of the most relevant and perceptive articles to be written on Africa is the still indispensable one by Henry L. Brinton, ‘Current Political Thought and Practice in Ghana’, American Political Science Review, 111, Mar. 1958: 46-63.
can be ‘scientific’, and that the uniqueness of human behaviour precludes the possibility of benefiting from theoretical efforts. To the proponents of this view, the very mention of the word ‘theory’ is dismissed as an exercise in futile abstraction, or pseudo-science. This attitude persists largely because the right questions have not been asked in the endless debate over the relevance of theory in the social sciences. The issue is not whether theory as understood in the natural sciences can be applied to the social sciences, but the extent to which it can enhance the explanatory potentiality of the latter.

What justifies scientific research is not the discipline within which it is conducted, but the internal logic of the research project itself. Uniformity in research techniques is not a requisite, nor are the methods of the natural sciences the only ones that meet the norms of scientific research. According to one observer, ‘the methodology of a scientific discipline is not a matter of its transient techniques but of its logic of justification.’ Therefore, any suggestion that ‘the social sciences are methodologically distinct from the non-social sciences’ denotes not merely the ‘banal view that the social sciences employ different techniques of inquiry, but rather the startling view that the social sciences require a different logic of inquiry’.

Closely related to political inquiry, and indeed inseparable from it, is the question of theory. The fact of investigating political behaviour constitutes an attempt ‘to explain it, which means that we encase it within one theory or another’. To expand the perimeter of theory, is not to suggest that all theories must be ‘as tightly woven as established scientific ones’. Therefore, any effort which can ‘adequately generalize a number of events’ merits a theoretical designation.

The necessity of theoretically oriented studies in the social sciences has been demonstrated by numerous efforts in this direction. For theory does no more than demonstrate ‘that within a certain limited range defined by qualifying conditions, the generalizations hold true in fairly close approximation’. Are we then to suggest that there is no utility for such methods in the social sciences? To argue for more theoretically oriented studies is not to demand that the social sciences must demonstrate the same predictive capacity, and precision as is the case with the natural sciences. We have argued that it is not the degree of predictive certainty that makes a theory, but its internal logic. Thus while we cannot state that an authoritarian political system will develop democratic features, within a specific period, we could at least suggest


that given certain conditions, it will veer towards a democratic order. A hypothesis of this nature could readily be tested. Indeed, there is no uniform method for testing all models, because ‘when a hypothesis is designed to explain certain observed phenomena, it will of course be so constructed that it implies their occurrence.’ Because of the dynamism in scientific research, the formulation of one theory may lead to the revelation of deeper schisms, which may in turn serve as a catalyst for further research.

If at the end of this essay we outline conditions which could imbue features of responsibility in one-party government, we will be doing so in the hope of setting in motion a ‘continuous process of feedback’. While it is probable that such conditions may guide future research and help to clarify contested elements of political order, efforts to improve upon them may generate momentum for still further research. In the end, some fruitful results are bound to develop from this process.

III

Unless the factors which contributed to the popularity of the one-party system are delineated, it would not be possible to draw meaningful conclusions with regard to its implications for post-independent Africa. The unnoticeable interval which elapsed between independence and the era of single party government has in part been responsible for the fact that studies of the former have tended to be confused with the latter. Why for instance, were the multiparty systems which prevailed suddenly discredited with the attainment of political independence? If they were relevant to pre-independent Africa, then what happened thereafter? Briefly, in the struggle for independence, diverse nationalist groups united, if only in fragile coalitions, with the main objective of discrediting the colonial system. Insofar, however, as they were united, insofar as they wanted to hasten the attainment of freedom, the major centripetal factor was the perception of colonial authorities as the enemy. In which case, their own differences were submerged to the objective of fighting the larger evil. Thus unity was provided by a negative factor. What was to happen after the enemy had departed? This question raised insurmountable problems because most of the nationalist leaders had neither a political programme nor possessed any meaningful conception of the skills required for national leadership.

In most cases, the pursuit of parochial objectives became an irresistible attraction. But the major source of disagreement centred around the question of distributing political rewards. Were the depth of commitment to national development appreciable, this problem might not have

2. Ibid.: 37.
assumed such all encompassing dimensions. There was little doubt that more than genuine dedication to national priorities, the combatants were immediately concerned with the quest for personal enrichment, and how much went to their tribal or primordial communities. Because identification with the primordial community attracted a potent urgency, the State machinery was reduced to a political orphan, and, without adequate support, it faced imminent disintegration. Even those who portrayed themselves as defenders of national institutions were in most cases as determined to advance personal interests as their opponents.

There was a heightened conflict between primordial cohesion and national service; and in the majority of cases, the latter attracted attention only as a means to pursue other interests. Not only were two loyalties in competition, but more frightening to the goal of national integration was the fact that there were 'competing loyalties of the same general order, [and] on the same level of integration'.¹ This competition was understandable, even if it could not be justified; for the tribal units which competed with the new States were in some instances more credible candidates for nationhood than the States which demanded their loyalty. The strength of primordial sentiments was in some instances strong to the degree that the creation of new States within the national territory seemed a near certainty: witness Buganda in Uganda, Biafra in Nigeria, and Katanga in the Congo.

The emergence of these centrifugal forces was blamed on the divisive nature of colonial rule, and the sudden creation of 'artificial States' at the time of independence. Underlying these separatist sentiments, however, was a more fundamental question: What were the limits to the right of self-determination? If more cohesive tribal units opted for autonomy, what was to be the response of the national leadership? Were they to suppress legitimate dissent in order to promote national unity, or yield to the right of self-determination and pave the way for national disintegration? The circumstances were unique, and there were few examples in recent political history to serve as basis for resolving these problems. And because the State machinery was weak, the dominant party emerged as the force with preponderant authority to exact obedience from dissenters. As Coleman and Rosberg have suggested, 'in the immediate post-colonial period in many African States, the dominant party seemed to be the national institution most capable of performing a variety of political functions.'² This situation provided ready justification for the dominant party to explain its monopolization of political authority; for the survival of the new States was then hailed to depend on the acceptance of de jure one-party government.

To make the situation more palatable, partial examples were sought

² Coleman and Rosberg: 657.
in order to portray one-party rule as both necessary and desirable. In this vein, few questioned Kwame Nkrumah's contention that post-independent Africa was 'almost analogous to a state of war and national emergency which is always met in the older established countries'. Because the multiparty system was dismissed as 'institutionalized factionalism' which divides the national will, dissipate national energy and threaten internal cohesion, the survival of the new States was supposed to have made necessity of single party rule.¹

But this argument was not altogether convincing. The comparison with coalition governments during national emergencies in the established countries was tenuous; for in the case of Africa, the major combatants did not subscribe to the view that a national emergency existed. To the 'outs' this argument was a pretext by the 'ins'² to abrogate their political rights in order to continue in positions of power.

There could equally be a case against the position frequently adopted by opposition groups. Does the mere fact of one party rule necessarily violate democratic tenets? In this vein, one observer has suggested that 'the number of parties is far too simple a criterion upon which to decide whether or not a system is democratic.'³ This is not to suggest, however, that African one-party governments have demonstrated any appreciable commitment to democratic norms. On the other hand, this failure cannot be attributed to the one-party system as such; for as a political structure, it can do no more than register the preferences of the leadership. The acceptance of responsible government depends more on the attitudes of political leaders than on any particular institutional set up. It is no accident that the adoption of constitutions which are similar to that of the United States has not sufficed to produce an identical pattern of political behaviour on the part of many developing countries. It is necessary that the single party as an institution be distinguished from the attitudes of the political elite.

What political leaders do provides a more reliable index as to the level of democratic tolerance than could be obtained from impressive constitutional documents. For instance, the formation of coalition governments in Britain and Canada during the war did not lead to the institutionalization of authoritarian practices in their respective political systems. Nor could the widespread corruption, public manipulation and election irregularities which existed alongside Nigeria's multiparty system before the January 1966 military take-over be described as enviable expressions of responsible leadership. To a large extent then, the


² This usage follows that of Maurice Duverger, Political Parties, London, 1954: 418.

shortcomings of African one-party governments could be attributed to
the fact that the early nationalist leaders were ‘not themselves necessarily
committed to representative government’.\(^1\) We must thus distinguish
between agitation for political independence and commitment to responsi-
bles government. The latter is far from reach in contemporary Africa,
largely because of the apparent belief that the preservation of order and
political stability leaves no room for such considerations.

But is stability possible in an atmosphere which is characterized by
political irresponsibility? What precisely do we understand by stability?
This concept has been subjected to a curious interpretation in African
politics. Centralization of authority, ostracization of opposition groups,
and widespread resort to coercive tactics, have all been justified as
means to bring about stability. The illusion is thus created that stability
can be attained through coercion. Claude Ake has argued that political
stability depends on the ‘existence of and commitment to a normative
culture regulating the flow of exchanges within the political system and
its environment’.\(^2\) In its normative sense, stability results from order
and consent rather than coercion.

The attitude seems to be that continuation in positions of leadership is
synonymous to stability. Whoever happens to be in power at any
particular moment, therefore demands personal loyalty and support for
the personality cult, presumably as guarantees to political stability. In
this vein, any form of dissent ‘is regarded as anti-nationalist, and therefore
illegal in spirit, if not by statute’.\(^3\) The resulting silence is interpreted
as consent. But the extravagant pursuit of the personality cult tends to
create no more than the appearance of stability; for once authority is
personalized, the problem of political succession will more likely be
imbued with features of intractability. And where no agreed upon
formula regulates the transfer of power, every conflict becomes indistin-
guishable from attacks against the legitimacy of the political system.

That African governments now find themselves in a circular process
is no accident; how can the leaders preserve their positions at all costs
without jeopardizing the legitimacy of the system? Instead of elimi-
nating such problems as promised, the one-party era has merely exa-
cerbated them. It would be argued that claims which were advanced
in justification of one-party rule can equally be invoked to discredit
that form of government. The frequent resort to coercive measures
rarely enhances the prospects for creating a system within which
conflicts over allocation and succession could be resolved through
mutually agreed upon procedures. To be viable, consent, not coercion,
should be relied on as a means to ensure the orderly conduct of politics.

1. Myron Weiner and Joseph LaPalombara, ‘Conclusion: The Impact of
   Parties on Political Development’, in Weiner and LaPalombara, eds., Political
3. Coleman and Rosberg: 663.
Certainly, if the post-independent situation was synonymous to that of national emergencies in the more established countries, then there might be justification for occasional resort to coercive measures on condition that they do not assume permanent features. But what has been the attitude of the elites to this question? As is the case in other countries, African politics has been dominated by the numerically feeble but politically powerful members of the elite group. Contrary to the notion that elites think more in terms of the nation than of their primordial communities, it is arguable that in the case of Africa, ethnic cleavages have assumed disproportionate dimensions within the elite group. From their ranks have emanated secessionist movements, conspiracies to take over control of political authority, and the resort to violence as a means to redress the political balance. The study of one-party rule must by necessity focus on elite attitudes, for they have largely been responsible for its popularization.

What is the elite perception of one-party rule? Do they view it as a temporary arrangement or are they satisfied to make it a permanent institution in African politics? Responses to these questions have been far from uniform, no doubt reflecting elite cleavages. While those in positions of power have tended to favour one-party rule, the opposition has usually resisted it with fierce determination, until overwhelmed by the government’s preponderant power. The reason for these conflicting responses can in part be attributed to the fact that whereas one-party rule tends to consolidate the positions of those already in power, it merely compels opposition groups to abandon their last hopes of ever forming a government. Despite frequent claims that the latter have usually dissolved themselves without coercion in order to promote national parties, we would argue that the contrary has generally been true. Tactics such as intimidation, exile, detention, and modification of the electoral system have been used generously before the formation of one-party governments.

Once the instruments of political competition have been weakened, the transition to de jure single party rule has had the appearance of enjoying popular support. Even thereafter, more determined members of the opposition have resorted to the use of violent tactics in order to redress the political balance. But such tactics have tended to provoke further repressive measures, ruthless incarceration of real, potential, or imaginary enemies, and such strategies that the leadership may deem necessary to protect its position. Where these conflicts have created an impasse or generated explosive tensions, the military has claimed the right to usurp political authority. Thus instead of promoting national unity, the single party endangers stability and impedes integration by discouraging the growth of that mutual self-restraint which makes the coexistence of different interests within the same political society pos-
The result is that groups which should be united in the interest of national development end up in mutual antagonism, thus hindering the realization of national unity.

Frequently, policies hailed as being in the national interest merely contribute to producing the opposite effects. And when politics is characterized by violence and disorder, political decay, not development, would be the outstanding attribute of such a system. Without the conditions that favour compliance with the legitimate rules of the system the power of single party governments would remain as formidable and certain as the instruments of coercion may guarantee. This fact cannot much be altered by the exaltation of such parties. President Sékou Touré of Guinea for instance, has described the Parti Démocratique de Guinée (PDG) as the country itself because ‘without it, the political life of Guinea becomes literally incomprehensible’. Such hopeful rhetoric creates an appearance which could not readily find support in political reality. The sudden disintegration of one-party governments after military take-overs testifies to their fragility. Witness the fate of such once famed parties as that of Nkrumah in Ghana, Obote in Uganda, and Keita in Mali. Identification with the party is no longer profitable once it has been removed from power, since it appears to represent nothing other than the quest for, and retention of political authority.

The suppression of the right to dissent seems to be one major weakness of the one-party system; for only the expression of individual sentiments can enable a government to gauge its standing with the public. Indeed, a prudent leadership would profit immensely by encouraging a free flow of information. But where the opposite conditions exist, semi-independent minded party officials tend to be mistaken for saboteurs, thus negating the fact that an all inclusive single party should ‘contain and utilize dissent’. Claiming that they are open, single parties practice a closed policy with proven sycophancy as a basis for membership.

Where all political activity revolves around personal adulation, the more ambitious and principled men are confronted with an acute dilemma: Should they join the extravagant personality cult in order to guarantee their political survival, or maintain an objective position and risk incarceration? When confronted with this question, most Africans have opted for the former, with the result that the possibility of leadership changes in an orderly manner has become further remote. The claim by Ruth Morgenthau that the prospects for leadership changes through the electoral process ‘may increase as the “national emergency” ends’, is a rather curious and unduly hopeful over-simplification. Unless

1. AKE: 94.
there is agreement on the existence of an emergency, it would be difficult to secure consensus on when it should be terminated. Opposition groups have dismissed the purported claims of an emergency as an imaginary creation, and prefer to view it as a pretext by the leadership to legitimize its monopolization of political authority. Moreover, an emergency by definition, implies a phenomenon of temporary duration. Could this be said of the distasteful aspects of single party rule in post-independent Africa? Yet, not only does this situation take on added repressive elements, but it threatens to be a permanently institutionalized emergency. What then does an emergency represent in such a setting?

To acquiesce in a situation does not necessarily imply consent. In the face of the government's pervasive machinery for terrorizing the populace into submission, deviating elites have dutifully bowed to necessity by recognizing their impotence. The subsequent capitulation of Kenya's Oginga Odinga confirms this view. After breaking with the Kenyatta led Kikuyu dominated Kenya African National Union (KANU) to found the Luo based Kenya People's Union (KPU), Odinga had set a rare example by leaving the more enviable position of Kenya's Vice President in order to become opposition leader. After the murder of Economic Planning minister Tom Mboya, also a Luo, KPU was banned and its leaders placed under detention. The combination of these events shifted the Luo tribe away from whatever proximity it might have enjoyed at the centre of political activity. Since 1969 therefore, KANU has been Kenya's only political party. After his release from detention two years later, Odinga had been sufficiently tortured that he decided to join his erstwhile opponents in KANU, no doubt in fear of being subjected to a similar fate thereafter. The change of heart was attributed to the fact that KANU had been 'revived and revitalized' and for this reason, Odinga urged his supporters to do the same because 'we joined the new KANU with open minds and open hearts.' But nothing had changed in KANU; as before, it remained a caricature of Kenya's tribal oriented politics. However, Odinga had changed; for having realized the futility of his quest to replace the government through the electoral process, he surrendered by recognizing his helplessness. He could hardly have done otherwise.

In nearly all African States, several people have suffered a fate similar to his. While Odinga he spent but a scant two years in detention, some have remained under such banishment since independence. These tactics are reminiscent of those used by colonial officials to suppress African nationalist activities; therefore, they should be viewed as 'a continuation by African States of a power exercised by colonial governments'.

There would be no justification in stating that the elites are unanimous in the support of one-party government, anymore than could it be valid to suggest that nationalist leaders were enthusiastic in their support of the colonial system. That the veneer of support for the single party is hardly perceptible can be seen from the fact that, once the army strikes, it fades away without resistance. It would appear that the party is accepted when it is in control of government, and rejected when political power shifts to some other authority.

V

If political expediency has influenced the elites to support the one-party system, what has been the attitude of the masses? A responsible leadership derives the power to govern from the electorate, and accounts to the latter at appropriate intervals. In a sense then, interaction between the leaders and the led makes government possible. By participation on the part of the electorate, however, we do not imply a ritual ratification of elections in which the outcome has been predetermined. Rather, we mean a situation where competition for political office is encouraged and the issues properly articulated in such a way that the electorate can make meaningful decisions.

These are only basic requirements. If the one party system incarnates the national will, if in the words of Rousseau it exercises the right of ‘forcing the populace to be free’, then it must possess a demonstrable right which guarantees this preponderance. Or, how could we determine that it is working in the national interest if its policies can neither be checked, nor discontents registered? To claim that a particular course of action is in the national interest presents few problems, but to prove that this is indeed the case is not always as easy. Admittedly, where the single party identifies with the entire nation, ‘the foundations of democracy are firmer than they can ever be where you have two or more parties, each representing only a section of the community.’ But this claim is as interesting as it has been difficult to prove in actual practice. How many single party governments can legitimately claim to represent the national will in contemporary Africa? Does not the fact of relying on coercive measures to institutionalize single parties negate the claim of popular support and national representation?

Nor is this fact much altered by the exaltation of one-party governments; for frequently, there is little substance to what is advertised as national parties. The national parties which led the fight for independence quickly disintegrated once that goal had been attained. Contrary to many hopeful assessments, Franz Fanon accurately observed that ‘the break-up of the party becomes obvious [. . .] and any observer, even

the most superficial, can notice that the party, today the skeleton of its former self, only serves to immobilize the people. Yet what seemed obvious to Fanon was hardly noticed by many observers. No doubt, the belief that everything was ‘developing’ precluded the possibility that there could be regression.

Amidst obvious inconsistencies, the attitude remained that the validity of political discourses could not be questioned. Thus what was directed at foreign consumption was hailed as representing political reality in post-independent Africa. From this source emanated the contradictory arguments to the effect that conditions in Africa were not favourable to democracy and that the one-party system was inherently democratic. True, there were party branches and officials even in remote villages. But their presence in villages was largely to ensure that dissenters were silenced, and where necessary to exact obedience by coercion. To be beneficial in the long run, the party must strive to break down ‘apathy and political ignorance, by establishing a cell in every village, and maintaining a steady flow of communication between leaders and the rank and file, in both directions’. Communication is even more important in societies which are confronted with the problem of changing the ‘forms of group loyalty from a traditional to a bureaucratic structure’, without which loyalty is likely to remain parochialized and thus hinder the cause of national integration.

Be that as the case may appear, it was argued that charismatic leaders — and many African leaders were said to possess some form of charisma— would single-handedly overcome every problem. On this premise, the glorification of leaders was justified and encouraged. The resulting hero-worship could be objected to on an important point; for organizations centered around personalities tend to face imminent problems of survival after the adored individual has departed. Furthermore, it is debatable whether African leaders possess an appreciable amount of charisma because ‘charismatic figures do not need the oppressive tactics’, which so many of them have used in order to remain in positions of power.

That the masses rejoice when their leaders are overthrown cannot much be altered by the now familiar pattern of near one hundred per cent electoral victories. In contemporary Africa, the practice is to present a single list containing the exact number of names as seats in the legislature to the electorate for what is to all intents and purposes, a redundant approval. What the voters do with the single list matters very little, or not at all; having been determined beforehand, the desired results are obtained. In a sense, African legislators are appointed. The uniform unanimity with which the voters are said to support the single lists constitutes an entirely unique drama; if its comic features cannot nullify

2. Lewis: 22-23.
3. Are: 53.
4. Lewis: 32.
the purpose of such ‘elections’, nonetheless, no impartial observer can take them seriously. But what is the purpose of elections of this nature? It is doubtful if they could suffice to create the appearance of participation. As one observer has suggested, these tactics have been based on ‘providing the appearances of participation without at the same time giving up the control of power generally associated with admitting additional actors into the political system’. Clearly, such a practice veers towards political irresponsibility.

Faced with this situation, the masses have responded accordingly. On the surface, they accept governments which they would sooner overthrow, aware of the consequences of dissent they have accepted silence as the only guarantee to their survival. Given this situation, the claim by Ali Mazrui that public demands for the installation of Nyerere as life President in 1965 could be regarded as ‘an indication of the responsiveness of ordinary Africans to certain monarchical ways’ is questionable. While Tanzanians might have desired this course of action, it would be rather hasty to generalize it as an element of African political culture. Opportunism has permeated African politics to a disproportionate degree, and demands for life Presidents — which have been made in almost all African countries — may amount to no more than attempts by vocal groups to declare public support for the leadership in anticipation of being rewarded. Ordinary Africans know by now that failure to support whoever happens to be in power may lead to arbitrary punishment, or the deprivation of their regions from essential services, such as schools, hospitals and roads.

To be sure, all African single parties have not followed this unhappy direction. The general elections in Tanzania (1965) and Kenya (1969) demonstrated that given a committed leadership, the single party could operate with some form of democratic order. The surprise changes in the Tanzanian election suggested that it was free from political interference. Apart from the President who was unopposed, several candidates competed for election within the single party, the Tanzania African National Union (TANU); and in the end, ministers, senior party officials, and Nyerere’s brother suffered defeat at the polls. In all, only about one quarter of those seeking reelection were returned to Parliament. A similar exercise, though with only few surprises was repeated in 1970. The Tanzanian experiment may yet prove that one-party government can respond to popular wishes.

Conclusions

In this essay, we have argued that official claims about the democratic nature of one-party governments have not been substantiated by the actual operation of such regimes. The gap between what the party is supposed to do and what it actually does, has if anything, widened. This has been partly due to the over-reliance on coercion as a means of resolving political differences. Persuasion and consent are indispensable instruments in the quest for political order and stability.

The measures frequently adopted by one-party governments are precisely the opposite of those required to achieve their stated objectives. If the functions of political parties must include interest articulation and aggregation, African parties would hardly merit that designation. In this case, the suggestion by Henry Bretton that Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) was a political machine and not a party, would have a wider applicability in Africa. The difference is that whereas political parties seek to mobilize public opinion in support of their objectives, the sole function of a political machine is to win and retain political power at all costs. Not only was this true of Nkrumah's Ghana, but we would suggest that with very few exceptions, all African one-party governments belong to this category. It would therefore be premature to state that the one-party system has failed in Africa, for it has yet to be subjected to a serious try in that continent. Were the political leaders committed to democratic tenets, the results might have been different.

Secondly, there is nothing inherently democratic or otherwise in the one-party system. The success of any party system tends to be influenced by factors quite apart from the number of political parties or groupings. Much depends on the political culture and the extent to which the leadership tolerates dissent and other practices usually associated with democratic government; to a considerable extent, the latter too, depends on the former. But the argument that one-party government can be democratic merely begs the question: Under what circumstances can this be possible? This depends essentially on four conditions.

1. The leadership must be knowledgeable and committed to the ideals of responsible government. Depending on the attitudes and intentions of the leadership, political structures can either be used for good or ill. And in societies which lack an established democratic tradition, the character of the leadership can make a difference between order and instability.

2. Within the elite group, and indeed throughout society, there should be opportunities for leadership mobility. Sudden changes and

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military take-overs rarely favour the evolution of a stable order. When the ambitions of competent men are repeatedly frustrated, they may resort to extra-legal means in order to redress the political equilibrium. The result will be a drift to violence instead of the ballot-box as the determinant factor in political competition.

3. There must be meaningful interaction between the leaders and the masses. The latter must be provided with the means to sanction leadership choices or register their discontent. Without participation in the selection of political leaders, the masses are not likely to identify with them, and may thus feel a sense of helplessness and isolation from the community. And if loyalty is to be transferred from parochial units to the national level, mass participation in the political process must be given more than ritual attention.

4. The acceptance of these conditions will depend on one key factor: a sense of proportion. No one is indispensable in politics and the personality cult can do no more than insulate the leadership from reality. Without a sense of proportion, political competition, much less defeat, is not likely to be tolerated.

The extent to which these conditions are accepted would determine whether orderly government could evolve in a one-party system. Instead of promoting political order, violence is bound to make instability a constant threat to African societies. With a determined leadership, the one-party government could serve as a basis for national unity and genuine stability.

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K. Tunteng — Vers une théorie du parti unique en Afrique. En dépit de la prévalence des systèmes politiques à parti unique en Afrique, le phénomène reste assez peu étudié sur le plan théorique. Parmi les causes favorisantes il faut relever les tendances centrifuges (tribalisme v. nationalisme, etc.) manifestées après l'indépendance. Le parti, en tant qu' Institution, ne se confond pas avec l'attitude pratique de l'élite politique; il y a une certaine confusion entre stabilité institutionnelle et maintien d'une même équipe au pouvoir. Cette dernière exigence est génératrice de contradictions, la suppression totale de l'opposition menant à des conflits de fait au sein de l'élite politique. La possibilité d'intervention des masses est réduite à néant par une contradiction analogue. En fait les méthodes mêmes des partis uniques contredisent leurs objectifs officiels.