

## MASS MEDIA AND PERSONAL RULE IN AFRICA

### RESUME

Les instruments de communication sociale fonctionnent souvent d'après les caprices d'un régime donné. Ainsi, les media s'efforcent à protéger, promouvoir et soutenir le régime qui fournit la logistique pour sa naissance, son développement et sa mort.

Les régimes qui dominent la scène politique en Afrique sont caractérisés par la personnalisation du pouvoir par rapport au système institutionnalisé. La vie politique y est généralement cachée derrière un rideau opaque où opère un groupe restreint composé des membres d'une tribu ou de ceux liés par d'autres intérêts.

Ce petit groupe fait tout pour contrôler les media d'une manière préemptive, préventive, défensive et compartimentée. Cette tendance à manipuler les moyens de communication vise à consolider la dictature qui se manifeste par : l'unanimité, la concentration et la privatisation du pouvoir, l'insécurité générale et la marginalisation de la masse qui est privée de tout.

### SUMMARY

*The instruments of social communication always operate in a polity. As such, the mass media seek to protect, promote, and sustain the polity which provides the environment for their birth, growth and death.*

*The dominant polity in Africa is that of personal rule in contrast to institutionalized rule. That is, political life in Africa is generally concealed behind the opaque screen of a very small circle - tribal or otherwise.*

*This circle therefore seeks to control the mass media : (a) pre-emptively ; (b) preventively ; (c) defensively and (d) compartmentally. These manipulative tactics in media use are intended to buttress personal (1) unanimity, (2) concentration and privatisation of power, (3) general insecurity among, and (4) isolation of, the dispossessed African masses.*

## MASS MEDIA AND PERSONAL RULE IN AFRICA

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### I. INTRODUCTION :

A mass media system is also a kind of mirror image of a nation's political and economic structure. Each is sensitive to the other. Newspapers, radio, television, and media do not operate in a vacuum ; their content, their reach, their freedom, and their audiences are determined by the context of the nation in which they operate.<sup>1</sup>

From this quotation, it is logical that the mass media must «reflect the persistent groundswells evident beneath the stormy surface of African politics».<sup>2</sup> The «context of the (African) nation» is that of shaky political structures intended to provide not for legitimate political opposition, rule by law, and legal protection , but for personal rule.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, immediate pragmatic and political considerations of personal rule are more decisive in the use and control of the mass media than are any explicit development goals. Whereas,

In the great human drama being played out in Africa, the news media have many roles to play : to aid in nation-building, to inform and edify individual Africans, and to explain Africa to the outside world that is still too ignorant and unsympathetic.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, the political function of the mass media in Africa has been of crucial importance in their evolution. The personal

rulers use the official media to reinforce and support their political objectives. Hence, the official press evolves as a political instrument, an organizational tool for moulding a political organization, and in time, plays a role in the struggle to institute and/or strengthen personal rule.

First, could the material advance of the African people be the goal of personal rule ? Then, personal rulers have been unwise to bring upon their peoples they seek to protect a slow run-down of those material solaces which is the basic business of politics to provide : public transport, medical care, jobs, houses, and education. Second, has the goal been mental satisfaction of personal rulers ? Then, it is perverse that a lifetime's familiarity with violence and fear - political terrorism - be implanted in a new generation of African children.

Indeed, in great and small things, the movement against reason is a fact, even if not a totally new fact. And the business of the journalist is to resist it with his chosen weapon : words.

Paradoxically, most African media-men look for examples of such excuses for their mediocrity and sycophantic adulation. Today they extol the rulers and the next day, they cheer their overthrow - without missing one day of broadcast or publication.

This phenomenon is not new in media history. A government can use at any rate, part of the work of journalists simply as a mouthpiece, presenting its views without inconvenient objections and without much notice of rival activities or comments. That was how the O.R.T.F. read its function during the de Gaulle years in France. But the view of the Director of News of its principal channel began to change after he left office. As he, Pierre Desgraupes, said to l'Express in July 1970 :

If a man has fallen into the habit of going to a government office every day to collect his orders, I know of no serum which can change his attitude overnight. Not even lion serum. And if I had some lion serum, and transformed one of these journalists, I'd still have to transform the man he goes to see as well ; because if he'd seen the journalist suddenly coming on like a lion, he would have taken him for a lamb and kicked his bottom.<sup>5</sup>

Pierre Desgraupes is stating a case of the personalization of O.R.T.F. by a personal ruler - Charles de Gaulle. The passage demonstrates that for de Gaulle, O.R.T.F. news editors could be free to discuss all internal and external affairs that did not reflect adversely upon his person and acts. Since all issues of substance

were traceable to him, very little was left for the news editors to discuss without explicit presidential approval.

In sum, freedom of the press in France in 1970 had doubtful legal protection. It existed at the whims of officialdom. And no one dared to use the printed or spoken word for direct attacks on the French Chief of State himself or any programme or action he strongly advocated. This attitude towards the mass media in France has been noticeably reflected in the behaviour of peripheral Gaullist leaders in Africa.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the constitutions of Gaullist African states were drawn up at independence to reflect this aversion to press freedom. The case of Côte d'Ivoire is indicative. Although press freedom was guaranteed in the constitution of Côte d'Ivoire, a 1959 Law for strengthening the protection of public order «made it possible for the government to confiscate or ban any publication which intentionally or not, brings about a disregard of the laws of the country, or injures the morals of the population, or casts discredit on the political institutions or their working» or has content «as to make these consequences likely».<sup>7</sup>

Nowhere in Africa was there any viable protection of the interests of the mass media against political pressures. Henry Reuter was wrong in asserting in 1967 that :

At present, there is a great deal of press freedom in Kenya, despite the occasional pressures, and I believe, personally, that as things appear at the moment, this freedom will expand rather than contract as the economy grows and the government matures.<sup>8</sup>

Reuter was proved wrong with time. The reason is that different shades of political oppression, exploitation and social injustice have persisted long after independence, and attempts by the Kenyan press to fight these abnormalities caused them to clash with the Kenyatta-Moi governments.

Even in Nigeria, the picture has not been all that rosy. Chude Okonkwo is right in his claim that :

With independence won and the colonial government gone as the target of the nationalist press, the pre-independence method found disfavour with the Nigerian government. Attacks on the government and personalities gave the press an image of responsibility. Not only did the Nigerian government leave the punitive acts in the law books, but it passed new ones. It went further to take over most of the newspapers the-

reby making the newspapers nothing but shadows of the pre-1960 stature.<sup>9</sup>

The critical question here is : if after independence, poverty, inequalities, disease, exploitation, repression, etc. persist, and even intensify, why should the mass media which proved an effective weapon against injustices in the colonial times be considered as inappropriate tools now ? This question is best answered by examining the character of the hydra-headed phenomenon of personal rule itself in the continent.

## 2. CHARACTER OF PERSONAL RULE.

The central concern of every political system, however its leaders are chosen, is the exercise of political authority. The authority of government reflects two complementary characteristics : compliance with the basic political laws of the state and voluntary consent for the institutions of government - that is, the constitutional regime.<sup>10</sup>

This proposition is doubtful in political systems of personal rule. The personal ruler ensures that political life is generally concealed behind the opaque screen of a very small circle. That is, why personal rule tests the will, skill, and fortunes of politicians, especially rulers, more than institutionalized rule. The reason is simple. As evidenced by its core feature, personal rule,

...is a dynamic world of political will and action that is ordered less by institutions than by personal authorities and power ; a world of strategem and countermeasure, of action and reaction, but without the assured mediation and regulation of effective institutions.<sup>11</sup>

First of all, systems of personal rule have been predominant in Africa and wherever these political systems have proved capable of delivering political goods, this has been due primarily to the ability of rulers and their small circles to take firm control of the political situation. In some situations, state institutions have been weakened and the organizations of government limited in their power capabilities to enhance the operational terrain of the personal ruler. That is why institutions and governments are remembered almost entirely in terms of the exceptional politicians who had to contrive and manage personal systems of governance in the absence of effective institutions.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, as students of Machiavelli know, African rulers do not hesitate to use «strategem and countermeasure» to disarm the

opposition. To evolve and sustain personal rule, African leaders have used strategem and naked force in the following ways :

(1) Cooptation and consultation to demonstrate that their power is legitimate and therefore part of the State ;

(2) Patronage, the skillful exchange of state resources, especially in the form of well-paying jobs as a means of enforcing political quiescence among officials. Or patronage has been extended to selected individuals by way of appointments to lucrative duty posts as presidential favours or gratitude to faithful local notables ;

(3) Agreement and accord, through conspiratorial methods, to let the Chief (Thief)<sup>13</sup> of state rule without public contestational politics associated in his mind with ethnic and generational conflict, instability, and disorder <sup>14</sup> ;

(4) Outright intimidation and coercion through rule by decree, by general ban, state of emergency, and by specific permit, is a benchmark of personal rule.

Thirdly, personal rule is characterized by reactionary politics. Politics, indeed, is perceived as a zero-sum game<sup>15</sup> obeying only the law of the jungle - eat or be eaten. Examples are not far to seek. While opening the new headquarters of the Ghanaian News Agency in the fall of 1965, Nkrumah specifically assigned the role of «helping to defeat imperialism and neo-colonialism» and «hailing those who advance the revolution and exposing those who retard it» to the media. Nkrumah went on:

We do not believe there are necessarily two sides to every question : we see right and wrong, just and unjust, progressive and reactionary, positive and negative, friend and foe. We are partisan.<sup>16</sup>

The sensitivity of African rulers to press criticism and the equating of criticism with subversion or even treason makes it difficult, therefore, to believe Hopkinson's argument that :

...having quite justifiably exploited press freedom on the way up, they (African leaders) have an honest hesitation about kicking the ladder away now that they are on top...<sup>17</sup>

Fourthly, and finally, personal rule is also characterized by a strongly feudalistic conception of society in the absence of «assured mediation and regulation of effective political institutions.» For instance, in institutionalized regimes the ultimate political crime is to act contemptuously of the law and the constitution. Whereas in a political system of personal rule, contempt for the ruler is extreme disloyalty.

In other words, personal rule is marked by the preponderance of relations founded upon vertical solidarity. These relationships may be based upon economic, social or ethnic sources. When such a situation is predominant in a nation, it gives rise to a unique political system differing from both the democratic pluralist model, in which consent plays a decisive role, and from authoritarian regimes, where coercion based on Law tends to be the decisive factor. It is for reasons of the uniqueness of personal rule that President Kenyatta could warn Kenyans of «disgruntled people out to sabotage the stability and good government of the country.» The feudal overlord added that his government was fully aware of the actions of individuals who preached disunity ; when the time came they would be picked up one by one.»<sup>18</sup> Kenyatta's preventive detention legislation sufficed to ensure that those accused of conspiracy and treachery were «picked up one by one».

That is to say, personal rule has recourse to both institutional authoritarianism as well as to private or local violence. Both forced mobilization and centralized coercive demobilization procedures of feudal systems are common. The feudal overlord must make contingency plans to stem the adverse effects of successions. That is, he must (1) exploit his position to acquire sufficient financial security such as money or property to avoid dependence upon precarious political or administrative office for income and advantage ; and (2) manoeuvre to be on the winning side after succession struggles, or avoid being identified with the losers.

### 3. MASS MEDIA AND PERSONAL RULE.

The mass media always operate in a polity. This existential situation automatically confers on the media the status of an organ of the system. And, like any organ of a system, the mass media are compelled to protect, promote, and sustain the system which provides the suitable environment for their birth, growth and death. It is, perhaps, for this reason that the monopoly of information and its mechanisms of dissemination through the press, radio and television are central in the struggle for state power. As Louis Althusser rightly points out :

... no class can hold state power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the ideological state apparatuses.<sup>19</sup>

In the capitalist system, for example, media ownership is private. This private ownership of the mass media is strictly consistent with the capitalist mode of production. In the capitalist mode of

production, private ownership and control of means of production is a central principle. Hence, the role of the mass media in the capitalist system is to protect, promote, extend and sustain the capitalist mode and relations of production.

Since in principle private ownership in the capitalist system is never the monopoly of any individual, different people speak with different voices. These differences are reflected in the mass media. And anybody who can afford a medium of communication can have his say against everyone else. This is what is conventionally called a «free market place of ideas», and it is said to be evidence of the freedom of the press. Here, the adversary within the capitalist system is government which neither owns nor controls the mass media. The fear is that government-controlled media may succeed in performing social and ideological tasks by maintaining local social inequalities, while boosting the credibility and legitimacy of unrepresentative regimes.

This concept of the role of the mass media attracts many reactions from media scholars. Indeed, there are even spokesmen in the West who contend that «the new nations (of Africa) with fragile societies needing to progress and to achieve a sense of national cohesion and nationhood, cannot really afford to have a sense of free press with open debate».20

What, indeed, would Merrill assign as a role to the mass media in communist societies with regimes which are terribly intolerant, aggressively oppressive, and stubbornly omniscient? In the communist system, mass media ownership is in the hands of government. This structure is logical. The reason is that in any communist or socialist society, ownership and control of the means of production is centralized. And the role of the media is therefore to promote, protect, and sustain the polity which creates the environment for its survival. Control of the mass media is through ownership and control. There is apparently no room for dissension.

That is mass communications are used instrumentally. They are used as an instrument of the State and Party in that :

- 1) They are closely integrated with other instruments of state power and Party influence.
- 2) They are used as instruments of unity within the State and the Party.
- 3) They are used as instruments of State and Party «revelations».
- 4) They are used almost exclusively as instruments of propoganda and agitation.



5) They are characterized by a strictly enforced responsibility.<sup>21</sup>

One would not be too wrong to suspect that Nkrumah had the communist conception of the role of the mass media. According to Nkrumah, the mass media must serve government, which is inseparable from the party and its leader. The press should inform and work for national integration and inspire the people, but not criticize the government or its leadership.<sup>22</sup>

The situation in Africa is strange. In Africa, ownership of the mass media may be private or government. This depends on which side of the capitalist - communist ideological spectrum that particular country finds itself. Nevertheless, there is a common feature of the mass media in Africa. It is that :

In the years since independence, one country after another has followed the same dreary pattern of suppression and victimization. A typical front page head story is likely to be a speech by a minister to a local party meeting, or indeed, a warning to «agitators» not to stir trouble. It sometimes seems almost impossible to pick up a newspaper in Africa without reading that some group or other has been warned about something they should not be doing. Meanwhile, the real stories about corruption and mismanagement by people in power, seldom if ever get printed.<sup>23</sup>

The disadvantages of such news suppression are inter alia,

- (1) Adversely affecting media credibility ;
- (2) Giving free rein to sensationalized and erroneous word of mouth rumours ; and,
- (3) Distorting news judgements. And «the real problem seems to be uncertainty on the part of the media, whether to play coy handmaiden or harlot».<sup>24</sup>

Yet, this «suppression and victimization» has its willing African apologists. The bizarre argument of Hilary Ng'weno is revelative :

... anyone who lived or travelled widely in Africa ... cannot fail to be appalled at the enormous amount of poverty, illiteracy, and disease that are to be found everywhere. Under some of the conditions, it is sacrilegious to talk about press freedom, for freedom meaning when human survival is the only operative principle on which a people lives.<sup>25</sup>

Thinkers of the ilk of Ng'weno argue that «public order» is more important than press freedom. Their conception of «public order»

comprises two fundamental principles :

(a) the maintenance of the political status quo ; and,  
(b) implicit in the first, the retention in power of a specific individual and his trade union of thieves. And all activities, proposals, and even all abstentions, likely to be interpreted by the regime as bringing into question one or the other of both principles, are treated as constitutive of grave threats to public order and, consequently, as instances of subversion subject to prosecution.

The «public order» neurosis derives from the tendency of African rulers to be preoccupied with power and its material perquisites. Power is specifically a preoccupation because it offers opportunities to the personal ruler and his «circle» to rise above the general poverty and squalor that pervades the society. It provides the opportunity of a lifetime to amass wealth and prestige, to distribute largesse by way of contracts, scholarships, and money to relatives, tribesfolks and political allies. Hence, political ideas as to how society should be governed and ruled to the best advantage of all hardly enter into the calculations of the seizure, consolidation and use of state power.

Rather, the intention, implicitly, or otherwise has been to :

- 1) Limit communication flow among the people ;
- 2) Promote general insecurity ;
- 3) Enhance the predilection for unanimity ; and,
- 4) Privatize and concentrate power in the personal ruler.

#### 4. PERSONAL RULE AND COMMUNICATION FLOW.

Unfortunately,

Many of Africa's vexing problems are related to breakdowns in communication and tied to the fact that so many Africans are not in touch with their leaders, nor with the cities whence come new ideas and the concepts of the modern world.<sup>26</sup>

The basic reason is that African rulers, once entrenched in power, insist that their perspective constitutes the objective and the final truth. They tend to build closed societies which engender their domination of the weak and the wretched masses. In the same way, they ensure the withdrawal of vital information through the creation of communication difficulties. This phenomenon is evidenced by sweeping censorship, repressive laws, a tamed judiciary, broadcasting or publishing scurrilous attacks on those suspected of being political opponents.

This is one of the reasons why African rulers tend to reject private ownership of the instruments of mass communication. For instance, opening a Conference of the Pan-African Union of Journalists in 1963, Nkrumah insisted that :

It is part of our revolutionary credo that within the competitive system of capitalism, the press cannot function in accordance with a strict regard for the sacredness of facts and that it therefore should not remain in private hands.<sup>27</sup>

Here lies the reasoning behind the temptation to monopolize information at home and to extend influence abroad and incidentally, to improve the image of the Chief of State. The masses thus operate in an information vacuum and their need for protection and mediation increases. This gives an ideal picture of the clientelist microcosm.

Freedom of the press and the horizontal mobility of journalists are sure conditions of competitive communication. But the masses are isolated through limiting the flow of communication. Good journalists are simply hacked down and the survivors are left gawking in shameless sycophancy as they defend mulishly every action of government even at the expense of accuracy and their self-respect.

The isolation of the masses can also be social, even psychological. First of all, there is isolation through the use of minority languages which are mainly elitist. Language may be defined as a system of arbitrary vocal and written symbols by means of which members of a speech community communicate, interact, and transmit their culture.<sup>28</sup> In accordance with this definition, the use of English, French, Spanish, etc. automatically :

- 1) Limits options available to the African rural populace in the sharing of information ; and,
- 2) Limits the integration of the indigenous languages into the communication process through the mass media in Africa.

Secondly, there is the isolation of the masses through the imposition of controls on the mass media; controls which only favour the ascendancy of the personal ruler. The instruments of control of mediated communication are :

- (a) Political practice of censorship by the dominant classes, fractions and factions that monopolize State power ;
- (b) Legislation which virtually denies the masses the right to be informed objectively, accurately, and timely so that any dissenting view is deemed «subversive»

and «anti-national» and should attract the exercise of state violence against its proponents ;<sup>29</sup>

(c) Recruitment and appointment of mediemen who condone crooked and corrupt government officials and upstage politicians hankering after cheap publicity ;

(d) Attribution of wide-ranging powers of arrest and preventive detention of journalists ; and,

(e) Maintenance of a judiciary system that knows no half measure in loyalty.

The irony is that such political systems also call themselves «democratic», whereas ;

The glory of the democratic way of life derives precisely from the fact that, as collective members of society, we commit ourselves to face all facts and to entertain all ideas that may be canvassed... Because we govern ourselves, we must have that full and unrestricted access to all facts and all ideas. Democracy is the most dangerous of all social experiments because it «condemns» us to make decisions in full knowledge of all available facts and ideas.<sup>30</sup>

Though «democracy is the most dangerous of all social experiments» it boots national integration. Clientelism and personal rule are tied to the difficulties of national integration in that elected officials who conduct government business and make binding decisions ;

... are (not) restrained by the influence of public opinion, the very instrument that put them into office. This public opinion is expressed primarily through the news media.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, since the «game» of politics in regimes having relationships of clientelism and personal rule has neither established rules nor effective referees, political life is necessarily conspiratorial, violent and coercive. And the flow of communication is jeopardized by the shifting caprice and whims of those who possess political power.

## 5. PERSONAL RULE AND GENERAL INSECURITY.

Personal rule develops where the problem of survival is faced daily. The client relations of patronage from a personal ruler provide a kind of insurance for peasants, dispossessed urban unemployed, etc. This insurance serves as an antidote for the precariousness of existence and the feeling of insecurity that ac-

companies it. Client relations is thus behaviour intended to reduce anxiety, distress in the face of calamities, and threats.<sup>32</sup> This behaviour originates from the quest for a protector.

Social disorganization in urban milieux are very favorable to clientelist structures. Rural exodus, accompanied by a high level of chronic and structural unemployment all multiply the number of so called «civic incompetents»<sup>33</sup> whose short-term expectations lead them to appeal for help. It is always easy to politicize such appeals for assistance. And it is perhaps for this reason that personal rule in Africa very often appears tied to the incomplete capitalist rationalization of the economy.

A monopoly of scarce and precious resources gives a personal ruler the capacity for total domination. The scarcity of the necessities of life and vulnerability of economic status are the two mainsprings of insecurity which consolidate vertical solidarities. Just as there is the politics of abundance, there is also the politics of scarcity.<sup>33</sup>

The most critical and rife means of control and domination is employment. Whatever the nature of the country's institutions, a permanent and high structural level of unemployment is generally responsible for clientelism and personal rule. That is to say, when employment is an ancestral aspiration appearing as «a sort of favour that... falls from the sky through a benefactor's act of grace»<sup>34</sup>, clientele relationships are inevitably to be found at the centre of social and political life.

In any environment characterized by a structural labour surplus and position-hunting, the person responsible for employment or giving out jobs and appointments to higher posts certainly has political power, even if he fails to monopolize such power. The exploitation of the anguish of the unemployed or those yearning for posts is a permanent feature of the politics of scarcity. In every context, unemployment is a decisive component of personal rule.

The difficulty of establishing horizontal solidarity organizations such as professional trade unions, say of journalists, is evident. The fatal reality of underemployment encourages clients to wish to be looked upon favourably by their patron rather than to organize on the basis of common categorical interests. It is the political system of each man for himself, of favour and recommendation, a politics that corresponds to the perception of the State as a cake of fixed size that has to be shared among a growing number of starving table companions of tribesmen or clients.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, it is not paradoxical that in African countries and regimes where the distribution of income is flagrantly unequal where social injustice reigns as master, class - and ethnic - conflicts and oppositions are weak in intensity<sup>36</sup>. But, despite such clientelist relationships of insecurity, the mass media may occasionally produce unanticipated and unwelcome results for personal rulers. Their reaction is generally that of intimidation, harassment, fraud, forced exile, repression, violence, and on certain occasions, assassination of journalists as in the case of Delle Giwa in Nigeria.

In some cases, press freedom is either simply abrogated from the constitution or media publications are subjected to visas before broadcast and journalists are served with queries after broadcast, suspension or outright banishment from broadcast, all designed to enforce control, kill initiative, and reduce them to a perpetual state of fear.<sup>37</sup>

The personal ruler instils chronic fear into the citizenry because of its political pay-offs. Fear paralyzes society by emptying man of all he is and all he has. Fear crushes man's intelligence annihilates his will and buries deep into the ground that which makes him a man - freedom.

The result is that what was once a human being becomes a robot, an automaton with conditioned responses to stimuli. Man endowed with reasoning, becomes an animal tout court, even less than an animal, because a man subjected to fear has only one instinct : self-preservation. This, the personal ruler achieves, by instituting primitive and barbaric laws intended to be implemented by his Kangaroo Courts and other symbiotic institutions of butchery.

The reason for instituting this frightful armory of horrendously repressive laws is to sentence the mass media to inane quietism and insecurity. The thinking of the personal ruler in such circumstances is that failure to do so would amount to cultivating platina of institutionalization so crucial to regime continuity and peaceful executive succession, encouraging the opposition (military or otherwise) to greater efforts. They abhor such institutionalization because it is both a sign of weakness as well as arming the enemy.

It must be remembered that the personal ruler institutes media control by focusing his attention on the efforts of the State to repress, isolate, or dissipate professional journalistic and other

interest demands through political, administrative, or military coercion.

In sum, the context of insecurity in which dependence networks develop, makes horizontal bonds of social solidarity, one must reiterate, almost impossible. Adherence to a professional association of mediamen appears as high a risk with uncertain benefits. The client journalist «prefers to minimize his losses at the expense of his independence, rather than seek» professional «autonomy».38

Thus, the vertical organization of «clientele systems is one of the most important obstacles to the outbreak of social revolutions» in Africa 39. And this is why employment and appointments of journalists by Africa's personal rulers, guarantees a minimum of social protection for the tamed mediamen, while situations of political tensions enable them to pay their debt to deserve any patronal largesse. It is within this context that patronal potlatch and the reminder of obligations to the personal ruler, erodes the temptation of common interest groups and horizontal ties of professional journalists.40

## 6. PERSONAL RULE, CONCENTRATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF POWER.

The central concern of every political system, however its leaders come to power, is the exercise of political authority. The authority of government reflects two complementary characteristics : compliance with the basic political laws of the State, and voluntary consent for the institutions of government - that is to say, the constitutional regime 41. In other words, institutionalized regimes, the ultimate political crime is to act in contempt of the law and the constitution.

But, in systems of personal rule, contempt for the Chief of State is the extreme disloyalty, «subversion of the superior interest of the state», and so on. This odious system derives from the development of clientele relations of personal rule. These clientele relationships develop especially, but not exclusively, in social contexts where durable and impartial status and guarantees of security are absent. Impersonal institutions, if available at all, provides neither the means for a rudimentary existence, nor those for effective social protection.

To concentrate and privatize power, the African personal ruler is sometimes even a threat operating through the gendarmes and veritable Gestapo police exactions, against which it is advisa-

ble for the weak to find the protection of a powerful private guardian 42. And since the personal ruler occasionally substitutes for the multiple patrons, and sets up a mass clientele system that, without abandoning the particularistic criteria of protection and listless dependence, gives a more impersonal dimension to the mechanisms of non-competitive media mobilization.

The ruling groups therefore strive to identify the regime of personal rule with the welfare state that they claim to be building. This drive to identify with the construction of a welfare state, manifests itself as the privatization of power. The type of personal rule, clientelism and non-competitive or sycophancy and town-crying journalism are therefore three closely interdependent aspects of the same phenomenon - concentration and privatization of power in the personal ruler.

This is explicable in the sense that the patronage of personal rule rests on a system of domination exercised by local media chiefs over protected and obligated professional clients which may constitute themselves into loose alliances of enfeoffed journalists to protect their patronal largesse, that is, the most ranting of journalistic demagogues or the most glistening of sycophants hand-picked into positions of «responsibility» within media houses.

It is, in fact, in social relations that clientelist control of the media has its most significant effects on concentration and privatization of power. In the political use of social domination, the clientelist media articulates the fundamental configuration of society through the institution of «free press» laws that protect their concentration and privatization of power but adds nothing to the freedom and progress of the common man. That is, the «free press» laws are symptomatic of the character of egocentric «tribalocrats» in government with an over-inflamed zest for political survival.

However, as a mechanism of media control, patronage and clientel relationships of personal rule, ensures a certain social peace. The partial satisfaction of immediate existential needs of cowered individual journalists, serves as a safety-valve for them in situations where the distribution of income is profoundly unbalanced in society. The favours dispensed by the personal ruler (patron) reinforce his hold over his clients. And the fidelity reward-in-exchange perpetuates a funnel structure in which the personal ruler situated at the top of the pinnacle goes unchallenged by the mass media of communication. And the system legitimates the concentration of wealth in its private form as well as corruption in the public realm.



## 7. PERSONAL RULE AND «UNANIMITARIANISM».

African countries provide a catalogue of rights in their constitutions. But constitutional dicta do not ipso facto ensure citizen rights. Why ? The reason is unmistakable. Much has to be done if the will and whim of a government is to be regulated on behalf of citizens. In the first place, enumerated rights must be justifiable rights. That is, individuals can secure them through the courts. To have a right without a remedy, is to have something of little value.

Second, individuals must have access to the courts in their own rights. This is partially a matter of procedure. Individuals must be allowed to bring suits to defend or advance rights and not solely dependent upon the discretionary decisions of the government's law officers. Resources also matter. Surely, it costs money to bring law suits, and aggrieved citizens need competent legal assistance to press their claims through the courts.

Third, judges must follow rules of law when deciding cases, and not simply echo views of the government of the day. There is little value in an aggrieved party marshalling overwhelming evidence and precedents, only to find the judge pronouncing the opposite. To stipulate that judges should follow the law is not to assert a discredited yardstick theory of a written constitution. It is simply to treat laws, legal procedures, previous decisions and dissent as rules of a game.

The prime choice facing African leaders in most cases is not how to proclaim human rights, but how to survive politically as well as maintain such authority as they have or aspire to. Since orderly compliance with their wishes always comes first, they turn to the civilian bureaucracy, the police and the army to make sure that subjects do what is expected of them.

To supplement these forces, the leadership uses the mass media to disseminate traditional or imported ideology justifying their rule. In other words, African leaders strive to use the mass media as a mechanism to avoid an immediate contest of political forces so that the citizenry may convince itself that its actual resistance would be of no avail. This is the quest for unanimity.

In his essay on superordination and subordination, Georg Simmel, has written a brilliant analysis of the search for unanimity. Though Simmel was referring to the latter Middle Ages in Europe, the situation is doubtfully different in Africa today. For one thing, the expression of a different point of view by the press (though willing to abide by the decision of Head of State (even when insignificant) is perceived as a threat. For another, as long as the

press exists to promote individual freedoms, it legitimately can claim a latent right at a future date to become the voice of the majority and therefore represents an intolerable challenge.

In this vein,

... we often find the principle that the minority ought to follow the majority. This principle evidently does not only involve the suggestion that the minority should cooperate with the majority for practical reasons : it should also accept the will of the majority ; it should recognize that the majority wants what is right. Unanimity is not a fact but a moral claim. The action taken against the will of the minority is legitimated by a unity of the will, which is produced retroactively. The old-German, real requirement of unanimity thus (becomes) a pale ideal requirement. But a wholly new factor is contained in it, namely, the majority's inner right, which goes beyond the numerical preponderance of votes and the external superiority symbolized by it. The majority appears as the natural representative of the totality. It shares in the significance of its unity, which transcends the mere sum of the component individuals, and has something of a superempirical or mystical note.

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When the word «majority» is substituted with «personal ruler», the striking feature of the effort to achieve unanimity is evident. It is an all-out effort of mobilization, coercion, and even faking mediated messages to achieve wished-for «unanimitarianism». The unanimity has a particular political, social, and psychological significance to personal rule in Africa. Since personal rule has no commitment to the notion of *pars majors pars senior* underlying majority rule in institutionalized competitive political systems, the mass media must give the impression of unanimity in political choice. The media must desist from recognizing «dissenting noises», political apathy and non-participation. Passive supporters are chastized by the media, since their activities represent an intolerable challenge and threat to personal rule.

In conclusion, control of the media by personal rulers in Africa has operated ;

- (1) PRE-EMPTIVELY within categories set out and controlled from above ;
- (2) PREVENTIVELY, by occupying a certain physical, temporal, and ideational media space foreclosing alternative uses of that space ;

(3) **DEFENSIVELY**, by encouraging the opposition media to act primarily in defense of its precarious rights, rather than in the aggressive promotion of new projects, interests or alliances ; and,

(4) **COMPARTMENTALLY**, by confining media-government conflicts to a narrow spatial and temporal context and orienting them inward, if not suppressing them outrightly, rather than towards wider national or international publics and longer time periods.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES.

- 1) Hachten, W.A., *Muffled Drums : The News Media In Africa*. (Iowa : The Iowa State University press, 1971), p.XV.
- 2) *ibid.*, p. XV.
- 3) For the idea of personal rule, see Jackson, R.H. and Rosberg, C.G. (eds.), *Personal Rule In Black Africa : Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1982).
- 4) Hachten, *ibid.*, p. 276.
- 5) Pierre Desgraupes says in French, «s'il l'avait vu tout d'un coup arriver en lion, il l'aurait pris pour agneau et il lui aurait botté les fesses». See *L'Express*, July 1970.
- 6) See Joseph, Richard, (eds.), *Gaullist Africa : Cameroon Under Ahmadou Ahidjo*, (Enugu : Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978), pp. 12-27.
- 7) Hachten, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
- 8) *ibid.*, p. 216.
- 9) Domatob, J., Jika, A., and Nwosu, I., (eds), *Mass Media and The African Society*. (Nairobi : ACCE, 1987), p. 5.
- 10) For a detailed discussion of the points made here, see Richard Rose, «Dynamic Tendencies in the Authority Of Regimes», *World Politics*. XX1, n°4, 1969, pp. 602-28.
- 11) Jackson and Rosberg, *op. cit. cit.*, p. 12.
- 12) We are thinking of the Nassers, Nyereres, Nkrumahs, Ahidjos, Kaudas, Khadafis, Senghors, Machels, Mobutus, Netos, etc.
- 13) In Cameroon, Anglophone students ridicule the French expression «Chef de l'Etat» by translating it to mean Thief of State. The thinking, well founded, is that their Heads of State have presided over the liquidation of State funds rather than being trustees.
- 14) See Richard E. Skryker, «A Local Perspective On Development Strategy in the Ivory Coast», in *The State Of The Nations : Constraints on Development in Independent Africa*, ed. Michael F. Lofchie, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1971), p. 124.
- 15) See Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government*, (New York : The Free Press, 1966),
- 16) Nkrumah quoted in Hachten, *op. cit.* ; p. 45.
- 17) Hopkinson, cited in *ibid.*, p. 50.
- 18) Kenyatta quoted in *Africa Contemporary Record*, 1973-74, p.B. 171.
- 19) Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, (New York : Monthly Review Press, 1971), pp. 135-160.
- 20) John C. Merrill, *Global Journalism*, quoted in Domatob, Jika, and Nwosu, *pp. cit.*, p. 18.
- 21) Siebert, F.S., Peterson, T., and Schramm, W. (eds.), *Four Theories of the Press*, (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1969), p. 121.
- 22) See Hachten, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 23) This exacting comment was made by the London Paper, *The Times*, in its review of the world press on July 23, 1973.
- 24) H. H. A. Cooper, *Terrorism and the Media*, in Y. Alexander and S.M. FINGER (eds.), *Terrorism : Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (New York : John Jay Press, 1977), p. 143.
- 25) Hilary Ng'weno, «The Role of the Press in a Developing Country», Address to the IPI Assembly in Nairobi, June 4, 1968.
- 26) Hachten, *op. cit.*, p. XIV
- 27) *ibid.*, p. 168.

- 28) This definition is a modification to include «written». See Victoria Frankin and Robert Rodman, *An Introduction to Language*, (Holt : Rinehart and Winston, 1978), pp.1-13.
- 29) See Clive Thomas, *The Rise Of The Authoritarian State In Peripheral Societies*, (New York : Monthly Review Press, 1984), p.116.
- 30) Charles Siepmann, *Radio, Television and Society*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1950), p.12.
- 31) Edwin Emery, Phillip Ault and W. Agee, *Introduction To Mass Communication*, (New York : Dodd, Mead and Co., 1975), p.18.
- 32) For more exhaustive discussions on client relations, see J.D. Powell, in *American Political Science Review*, LXIV, p.411.
- 33) Myron Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity : Public Pressure and Political Response in India*, (Chicago : Chicago University Press, 1962).
- 34) Marie-Antonietta Macciocchi, *Lettres de l'Intérieur du Parti*, (Paris : Maspéro, 1970), pp. 21-28.
- 35) For this perception of the limited good and its political implications, see Carl H. Lande, *Networks and Groups in Southern Asia : Some observations on the Group Theory of Politics*, *American Political Science Review*, LXVII (March, 1973), pp. 119-20.
- 36) Benno Galjart, «Class and Following in Rural Brazil», *America Latina*, (July-September, 1964), p.3.
- 37) See Abdelrahim Sale, «Subverting Freedom in Cameroon», *le Messenger* N°003, August 7, 1990, p.14.
- 38) J.C. Scott, «Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in South-East Asia», *American Political Science Review*, LXVI (March 1972), p. 102.
- 39) W.P. Wertheim, «Patronnage, Organisation verticale et populisme», unpublished MS., Paris, 1968, p.9.
- 40) Macciocchi, op., pp. 90-115. This anti-professionalism of mediamen is common knowledge in Francophone Africa where the enslaved under overbearing neo-Gaullist tyrants, broke the bonds of slavery in popular uprisings in Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Cameroon, Zaire, etc. just recently.
- 41) For an elaborate discussion of the concepts used here, see Richard Rose, «Dynamic Tendencies in the Authority of Regimes», *World Politics*, XXI, N°4 (1969), pp. 602-228.
- 42) P. Vieille in *Etat et Féodalité en Iran*, in *l'Homme et la Société*, XVII, (July-September 1970), pp. 259-260.
- 43) Georg Simmel, «Superordination and Subordination» in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff, (Glencoe, N.Y. / Free Press, 1950), pp. 242-4.
- 44) See Philippe C. Schmitter, «The Impact and Meaning of «Non-Competitive, Non-Free and Insignificant» Elections in Authoritarian Portugal, 1933-74» in Guy Hermet, Richard Rose and Alain Bouquié (eds.) *Elections Without Choice*, (London : Macmillan, 1978), p.167.