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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa48i2.4>

ISSN: ISSN 0587-2405

e-ISSN: 2415-0479

Acta Academica • 2016 48(2):
91-107

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Ending party cleavage for a better polity: is Kwasi Wiredu's non-party polity a viable alternative to a party polity?

First submission: 28 August 2015

Acceptance: 28 October 2016

Africa's current democratic outlook is a relic of the crowning vestige bequeathed by the colonial metropolis as a sign of the African's attainment of political freedom. As if to suggest that at the occasion of the attainment of that freedom, the African had become human, the metropolis demanded that formerly colonised territories had to democratise. This democratisation had to be of the same hue as of the metropolis. A particular aspect of Western democracy that has been deemed problematic on the African continent is its adversarial form crystallised by open and vicious competition for power between political parties. First to reject this party-polity were the first generation of African leaders. Disastrously for them, both their theories and practices were to be discredited, and as the personae fell so did their theories. The prominent African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu has led a sustained onslaught on the party-polity. He has attempted to show that this polity has several problems including that it is a poor version of democracy as well as that its structures promote considerable harm in the form

of unbridled competition for power, which all result in exclusionary politics. In the process of arguing for a more inclusive polity, consensual democracy, Wiredu has set his sights on outlining the precise nature of how such a polity is more democratic while at the same time shunning party politics. What I seek to do here is to present an assessment of some of Wiredu's arguments in support of consensus as a non-party polity. I wish to argue that the attempt of doing away with party politics is not very compelling. I also wish to show why those who read Wiredu's position as a return to a one-party state should receive a sympathetic hearing.

1. Introduction

Modern African history is characterised by some painful episodes of Africa's encounters with the Western world. Instead of benefiting from the modern developments and enlightenment of the West, Africa was to suffer untold oppression in the form of slavery and colonialism. To the credit of the modern African, she fought decisively in the face of some of this injustice resulting in the abolition of all these forms of oppression (Kasanda 2015: 40–44) and the attainment (see Serequeberhan 1994: 89) of nominal independence on the continent. At the end of these insensitive episodes of racial tyranny the African was allowed some form of participation on the table of humanity. In many instances the conditions of that participation were dictated by the former colonial powers. By extension the mode of governance, social, political and economic organisation was foisted on the Africans by their erstwhile oppressors (Carew 2004). The first generation of African leaders was incisive in its rejection of this imposition. These leaders, then, sought to develop a form of polity that would be consistent with the original values of socio-economic arrangements before colonial violation (Kasanda 2015). In particular they rejected a class-based economy and a multi-party polity, suggesting that these forms of economic and political organisation would foster division and discord that would probably lead to conflict. In place of these options they sought to argue for and develop a socialist-cum-classless society and a one-party polity. This, in their varied views, would not only lead to the total emancipation of African people but would forestall conflict based on party alliance and doctrine. Kwasi Wiredu, though largely unsympathetic to the cause and arguments of this first generation of African leaders, has also come to share in the denunciation of party-based politics. The version of polity that he argues for is now commonly known as consensual democracy or democracy by consensus. Wiredu shares with the first generation of African leaders the suspicion that party politics will lead to instability and must be replaced with a polity that does not feature competition for power between political parties. Although there is a basic similarity between Wiredu and the first generation of African leaders that lies in

their suspicious views of party polities, there is also a quite significant difference between them. While the leaders advocated a one-party polity, Wiredu argues for a non-party system. Wiredu aggressively distances himself from the position of a one-party polity both in articulation and envisaged practice. However, this has not totally precluded the charge that both in appeal and effect the non-party polity is the same as the one-party state of the first generation of African leaders. Leading this charge is T. Carlos Jacques (2011) who, in his dogged approach, targets Wiredu's arguments in support of consensus as a non-party polity. While most of Jacques's criticism is wrong-headed and based on a gratuitous misreading and misrepresentation of Wiredu, as Helen Lauer (2011) shows, I suggest that he raises at least one point that needs to be carefully attended to. Jacques argues that although Wiredu and supporters of consensus try to distance themselves from one-party polity, there is really no difference between that polity and their preferred non-party polity. He suggests that such a difference is merely semantic. While I think that the reasons that Jacques offers for his conclusion are largely wrong and philosophically unsustainable, I think that the conclusion he offers is worthy of serious consideration as it could be quite correct. My argument will be that supporters of consensus will have to spell out how their non-party is different from a one-party as opposed to merely asserting that to be the case. Further, I develop Jacques's position by demonstrating the inherent incoherence to be found in Wiredu's technical characterisation of consensus as party₂ and oppositional politics as party₃. My strategy differs from Jacques's in that I do not read Wiredu to be doing the same things as he reads him to be doing.

So conceived, the aim of this paper is very specific. I endeavour to analyse an oft-neglected aspect of Wiredu's argument that there is a difference between parties in a non-party polity, one-party polity, and a multi-party polity. Relying on the Jacques-Lauer debate, I seek to argue that there is good reason to think that a non-party polity and a one-party polity are not that dissimilar. Further through an analysis of Wiredu's notion of party₁, party₂, party₃ and party_{1,3}, I argue that the subscripts he assigns to the word 'party' to secure the differences among parties in different polities does not succeed.

This paper is divided into five parts; I start by outlining the broad reasons for the preferability of consensus, secondly I summarise reasons offered against the party system, thirdly I discuss Jacques's critique of consensus as a non-party system, fourthly I outline Lauer's objection to Jacques and fifthly I offer my own reason why Jacques's initial suspicion must be taken seriously.

2. Broad reasons for consensus

There are as many reasons for the support of consensus as there are proponents of it. Chiefly dominating the call for the adoption of a consensual polity are two reasons. The first has been characterised as a return to the source. This position holds that since most of traditional Africa had a highly organised democratic polity it would be useful to return to that mode or a variant of it to serve as a basis or an inspiration of our modern polity (Gyekye 1992: 244-251). Wiredu is careful to argue that he is not trying to retrieve a bygone era, in fact he is quite critical of most aspects of traditional practices (Wiredu 1980: 11-17). However, the more serious point that is being proposed in this articulation of the return to the source is the idea that there was a democratic system that worked in Africa's past and that system may prove highly instructive in Africa's search for true democratisation. What is being particularly rejected is the foreign imposition of an equally foreign mode of democracy that neither has roots nor a promising future on the continent. On the contrary, this foreign mode of democracy is ill-suited to the local conditions as well as political and developmental needs. What is actually observed to obtain is that this foreign polity is responsible for some of the woes that bedevil Africa.

George Carew (2004), for instance, argues that democratic liberalism is closely tied to global capitalism. In turn global capitalism, by its nature, consigns certain nations to be at the margins of its operations. Invariably, these countries are formerly colonised countries that are rendered dependent on capitalist institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. As a result they lose their political independence since their financial status is dependent on foreign institutions that do not favour the protection of the local people's conditions. Hence in the place of capitalism and its accompanying liberal democracy he suggests an alternative in the form of consensual democracy¹. While Wiredu does not seek to link the economy to the polity, he is quite clear that majoritarianism and the voting system based on party politics is responsible for authoring the innumerable problems that major parts of the continent are facing. It is not entirely clear whether he thinks that the adoption of consensual democracy may prove to be an economic panacea.

The second reason for the support of consensus is articulated by Wiredu (1997). He suggests that consensus is a better version or interpretation of democracy than its Western-inspired majoritarian counterpart. He argues that democracy is essentially about representation. With representation there are two forms of representation that must be satisfied if a democratic dispensation

1 Also see Ramose (2005: 115)

is to be identified as a maximal, as opposed to being a minimal interpretation of democracy. There is what he calls formal and substantive requirements of representation. Majoritarian democracy, according to Wiredu (*ibid*), is only able to satisfy formal requirements of representation while consensual democracy satisfies both the formal and substantive requirement. Formal representation refers to the electorate being represented in any given forum by a particular representative. Substantive representation refers to the idea that there is not only a representative of a particular constituency in the given forum but that representative articulates the views of her constituency in that forum. According to Wiredu (*ibid*), formal and substantive representation can only be satisfied under a consensual polity whereas majoritarian democracy only satisfies formal representation. This is because with majoritarianism, the representatives owe their allegiance to the party as opposed to the electorate. Thus they would rather express the views of the party than express the views of the people who voted them into office. On the contrary, under a consensual dispensation, since there are no political parties, each representative is directly answerable to her constituency and she owes her allegiance to her constituency and will be held accountable directly by her constituency. This renders party politics not only unnecessary but a poorer form of politics compared to a consensual polity.

3. Reasons for consensus vis-à-vis political parties

Wiredu (1997, 2001) offers four reasons in support of consensus particularly when it is conceived as an alternative to a party system. These reasons, ultimately, seek to show the evils of a party system. The party system, it is argued, retains certain features of political arrangement that perpetuate the evils of having political parties as the most important unit of political identity and organisation.

The first reason articulating why consensus is to be preferred and seeking to show why the party system is to be avoided relates to the brutal competition for votes that is associated with party politics. Wiredu (1997) argues that in the competition for votes, the competitors have been known to resort to unscrupulous means to win the votes that would guarantee them power. In Africa, in some cases, that competition for power has resulted in the loss of life and limb. In lesser cases it has led to massive corruption as in instances of buying votes, etc. This problem is also equally applicable to the developed world.

The second reason relates to the attitude imbued in how electoral outcomes are treated by the different political parties. Wiredu (1997, 2001) castigates what he calls the winner takes all attitude. This attitude is essentially that the person or party that has registered victory at the polls will rule by excluding all other political players. There is no room for consultation or accommodation of the

losers (Bell and Metz 2012: 86). This gives birth to at least two more important problems; it may result in the disaffection of the losers who, feeling left out of power, may then resort to illegal means to register their interests in the exercise of power. Or it may lead to losers engaging in what Wiredu (1997) terms opposition for opposition's sake. This obtains when the losers who become the opposition just oppose for the sake of opposing whatever the ruling coterie proposes without regard to the merit of the proposal.

Thirdly, as stated above, the representatives are more loyal to party doctrine than to their constituency (Wiredu 2001). Since representatives are mainly elected on a party ticket, they are supposed to toe the party line. They are neither expressly loyal to the wishes of their constituency nor loyal to the dictates of their own agency. Everything that they stand for has to be tailored to party doctrines to avoid falling foul of party apparatchiks. To my mind this problem can be extended to claim that power is only exercised by a few party leaders. Although parties may consult with their members and may allow ordinary members to have party meetings, the higher authorities in the party are the ones who have the final say on matters of policy and action that the party must follow. By so doing real power and decision making is concentrated in the hands of the party's highest organ. It is this organ that gives direction to all party members and ensures that a code is strictly maintained by all members. It is also the organ that is responsible for overseeing the general discipline of all members.

Fourthly, as Wiredu (1997) notes, in Africa instability can be traced to the fact that some ethnic groups are in the minority. In some cases the dominant ethnic group organises itself into a political party and by its sheer numbers, it is guaranteed to always win at the polls. Thus ethnic cleavages lead to political division which may have a number of undesired consequences. It may, for example, lead to people from certain ethnic groups being kept out of power forever. It may also lead to political decision making that favours the majority ethnic group. Developmental projects, for instance, may be restricted to the region of the ethnic majority while the regions of the minorities are ignored and thereby relegated to poverty. Levers of state power may also be preserved for members of the majority group who may feel compelled to be only of service to their fellow clansmen. This may lead to disaffection of the minority groups who rightly now feel like second class citizens.

It is for these reasons that Wiredu condemns party politics not only as an impoverished version of democracy but also as one that is responsible for some of the biggest problems that we see in Africa. According to Wiredu party-based politics have not actually promoted the development of genuine democracy in Africa, but have generated division at a large scale. These divisions have

not promoted democracy but have generally fostered chaos. A consensual dispensation may be able to curb the ills of party politics by its consultative nature and collective decision making. Since, in consensus, there are no specific winners, there will be no disaffection on the scale of party politics.

However, there are problems with this characterisation of non-party polity. Immediate questions arise as to whether this notion of a non-party polity is different from a one-party polity. Further, is this non-party polity truly more democratic than its one-party counterpart? In the next section I outline what Jacques considers to be the problem with the non-party polity. I suggest that although there is merit in his suspicion his argument is wrong.

4. Jacques's critique of Wiredu's non-party polity

Jacques's (2011) critique of Wiredu's notion of a non-party polity follows two paths. Firstly, he argues that Wiredu is engaged in a revival of the communalist order that is seen as responsible for the moral and political outlook of African life. Although this moral order was essentially found in traditional society, Wiredu seeks to re-invent its use in modern African society. This, for Jacques, effectively puts Wiredu in the same company as nationalists or the first generation of African leaders. Secondly, Jacques argues that this communalist mode of thought and construction of society is against any form of individualised construction of the self. Individuals are expected to act as part of the whole and to participate in the life of the whole community without insisting on their individual separateness or distinctiveness. Any request for individual separateness is seen as anti-communitarian and is immediately met with resistance or exclusion of the individual from the group. In this sense, for Jacques, Wiredu's non-party project is similar to that of the nationalists' one-party project. Both projects, according to Jacques, not only seek to revive a traditional form of democracy but also seek to eschew Western party politics. He notes that Wiredu's argument for a non-party polity is mainly driven by an attempt to avoid divisive party politics, yet the nationalist one-party polity seeks to go beyond Wiredu's project in one important aspect, hence he writes:

Wiredu's justification for non-party politics is based on his understanding that party politics are always characterised by conflict, that a political party inevitably represents sectarian or partisan interests, thus putting at stake broader common interests and in the case of Africa, undermining the basic collective of interests that animates traditional African society. Yet here again, the nationalists would concur with Wiredu. But then they view their own political parties as something more

than parties. This forces us to recognise, or at least consider the possibility, that when these older writers spoke of power exercised by a unique party, that they did not have in mind the traditional political parties of, for example, the liberal, representative democracies of Europe (2011: 1025).

He goes on to argue that the single party sought to differentiate itself from European political parties. Hence the real project of the single party was to unite all people and direct the divergent interests of citizens, giving rise to a modern form of traditional communal life and democracy. Relying on a number of nationalists, he arrives at this view: "In turn, and as a consequence, the single party was not supposed to impose itself by force or repression. It was to be *de facto*, the only ruling voice, not *de jure*, expressing as it would the nation's common interests" (ibid). He emphasises that the main goal of the single party was to foster unity ensuring that there was no section of society that was discontented. Thus he draws the following parallel between Wiredu's non-party and the single party when he writes: "The single party of the African nationalists was not then a traditional political party. Indeed, but for the name, it is identical to, I would contend, Wiredu's non-party political order" (ibid 1026). Jacques notes that Wiredu was critical of the dangers inherent in a one-party polity. In particular, he states that Wiredu was correct in pointing out how disingenuous the nationalists were in ignoring the dangers and tragedy that would follow, and that surely did follow, their one-party polity. However, Jacques charges Wiredu with suffering the same naïveté as the nationalists, hence he opines:

But is the naivety of the nationalists not equally to be found in Wiredu's non-party state? Some historians of traditional African politics have pointed to the authoritarian nature of many traditional African political regimes. And at least one writer has suggested that Akan forms of government were totalitarian. But again, the historical issue must be left to one side. What I do wish to suggest however is that the naivety in this dispute is to be found in the positions of both parties and that it lies at a deeper level than the arguments over how many political parties should be allowed to compete for power (ibid).

Further, he claims that the common theme running through both positions is that unity is distinctively African while division is foreign as it was brought by colonialism and it seeks to destroy African tradition. For Jacques, while nationalists claimed that institutionalised opposition is foreign to African tradition, modern thinkers like Wiredu go on to dismiss opposition, with the view that it is divisive. Thus Jacques goes on to argue that Hountondji's criticism of Nkrumah's consciencism as unanimist illusion is equally applicable to Wiredu's project. The

main thrust of the unanimist critique, according to Jacques, is that in traditional Africa there were no ideological conflicts and this is the polity that modern leaders and modern Africa should aim for.

Thus in essence, for Jacques, the greatest similarity and problem between Wiredu and the single party is that both are based on a need to revive a traditionalist community that is essentially characterised by harmony and an absence of division. This harmony is to be transferred to the modern polity which is plagued by divisions, not only as a correction of those divisions, but as an affirmation of authentic African modes of politics and social organisation. However, in both views there is a certain naïveté about the harmonious nature of traditional society and how it needs to be revived to play the role of ending the political problems on the continent. Hence Jacques maintains that the naïveté that Wiredu saw in the nationalists is equally applicable to him as his non-party polity may just as well lead to the same pitfalls as the nationalists' single-party polity.

5. Lauer's response to Jacques

Lauer provides a far more careful and nuanced reading of Wiredu. In response to Jacques's position she points out several instances where Wiredu has sufficiently shown that his advocacy of a non-party polity is not to be seen as the same as a one-party argument. Citing a number of his essays she maintains that "Wiredu repeatedly and explicitly disparages one-party politics and the ideological fig leaves used by early nationalists to cover their brute stronghold on power by suppressing political party opposition" (2011: 1032). Further she holds that: "Again in the (1998/1999/2001) publication that Jacques repeatedly cites, Wiredu explicitly distinguished his non-party vision from one-party suppression of the freedom of the press and of political association that make diversity of political opinion articulate and party formation possible" (ibid). Additionally, she shows that Wiredu is consistently critical of the one-party state's tendency to suppress freedoms such as press freedoms all in pursuit of consolidating power. She states that Wiredu spells out in greater detail than Jacques the chicanery of one-party states, as Wiredu shows how power can be used to manipulate the people to further the interests of those in power. In particular the façade of representing the people's popular will or interest may just as well be reduced to suit the needs of the powerful.

Importantly, Lauer succeeds in showing that Wiredu's notion of traditional communitarian life is not anything close to what Jacques depicts him as representing. Thus she does not see Wiredu as sharing in the romanticism that Jacques thinks is common between nationalists and consensus. She traces instances where Wiredu does not depict a harmonious traditional Akan society.

On the contrary, in the places cited by Lauer, Wiredu is seen to present a view that claims that the community existed for the sake of individuals and all its structures sought to give sufficient recognition to individual interests. Further, she holds that Wiredu does not seek to present traditional leaders as superior to modern leaders. On the contrary, Wiredu captures circumstances under which a traditional leader could be deposed. Mainly this would be done with a poorly performing leader or an overly charismatic leader.

Lauer then points out that Wiredu's bemoaning of the divisive nature of party politics is not a call for the return to a traditional non-party polity. She argues that Wiredu points out that the competition for power through party politics as seen in the US and UK is actually a condemnation of the general nature of party politics. The cut-throat business of party politics and at times the consequent paralysis caused by party divisions is actually a critique of party politics as opposed to a yearning, on the part of Wiredu, for a return to traditional communitarian society. Thus she writes: "From these few excerpts, at least, it seems clear that Wiredu's scepticism about the practicality of electoral politics in Africa is inspired not by any illusions about a lost harmony and unity intrinsic to past political cultures. He appears motivated rather by what he describes as the complexity and "variegated" multi-ethnic texture of contemporary African societies" (2011: 1034). In opposition to the idea that Wiredu is in search of traditional harmony and that individual freedom was suppressed, Lauer argues that Wiredu has actually demonstrated that decisional consensus did not require such drastic steps to be taken. "In all the published texts cited here Wiredu took care to delineate several senses of consensus, in order to illuminate how the compromises required for decision making do not entail any suppression whatsoever of divergent beliefs and values" (ibid). She emphasises that Wiredu points out that elders in council would reach decisions determining what was to be done without necessarily suspending their own opinions on what was true or false².

I am persuaded that Lauer's reading of Wiredu on this score is convincing and that she has a better and more faithful reading of Wiredu's actual position. She correctly picks out that Wiredu has neither a romantic/essentialist yearning for a traditional communitarian society chiefly characterised by harmony nor for a totalitarian society subjugating individuality. If anything Wiredu's description of those societies show that the community existed to protect individual interest. Also important is her argument that Wiredu's criticism of party politics is not advocacy for the return to traditionalism. Rather, it is a philosophical criticism of the shortcomings, inadequacies and problems attendant to party politics even as seen in the US and UK.

2 This is a problematic position though, as shown by Ani (2014, who questions whether it is possible for people to reach decisions on practical issues without also having reached the same opinion.

6. Going beyond Jacques's critique

At the beginning I suggested that I am in agreement with Jacques's hunch that there is a problem with Wiredu's notion of party. However, I disagree with the manner in which he has sought to arrive at demonstrating the problem. I also have some sympathy for his claim that there is no difference between Wiredu's non-party polity and a one-party polity. I am persuaded that it could quite be the case that there is no difference between the non-party and one party. However, I am not convinced that Jacques's manner of proceeding secures this conclusion.

There are certain basic mistakes contained in Jacques's analysis of Wiredu's position that render that assessment a straw man. For a start Wiredu is not the advocate of communal socialism that Jacques claims he is. Wiredu fully recognises that the era of traditional communal organisation is gone. Actually he has some harsh criticism of traditionalistic practices that cannot be justified. Secondly, Wiredu does not romanticise traditional society as a solution to whatever political problems Africa is facing. On the contrary, he is keenly aware that a lot needs to be done in refining some theoretical commitments of consensus, but most importantly he thinks that there are reasons to think multi-party democracy inferior to non-party democracy. Thirdly, Jacques is wrong to read Wiredu as in complete agreement with socialists such as Seko Toure. The likes of Toure described traditional communal life in order to secure unity that would not differentiate individual interests. While it is true that Wiredu (1997) talks of a rock bottom identity of interests, that notion is quite different from a conception of unity that is premised on the belief that difference does not exist. After all it is the same Wiredu (*ibid*) who argues that consensus would always presuppose dissensus. While it could be said that he is wrong about the nature of how interests in society can coincide or can be made to coincide he is not blind to the idea that there are some differences that do exist. His major problem is how those differences are to be reconciled into one programme of action.

What I wish to do then is to find a way in which Jacques's hunch can be developed into a compelling critique of the non-party polity. The intuitively plausible idea in Jacques's thinking is that there is no difference between a non-party version and a one-party version. On the other hand Lauer claims that a non-party system is not equivalent to a one-party system.

The first suggestion I have in mind that could help us to discern whether Jacques's hunch and my support for it are correct is to assess what the key characteristics of the following polities are: multi-party, one-party and non-party, insofar as their democratic status is concerned. While democracy may be interpreted differently, as Wiredu correctly suggests, there are crucial factors that must accompany this idea of democracy in respect of parties. The sense in which I use 'parties' is borrowed from Wiredu (2001) wherein he insists that there are two

senses to parties. The first sense refers to a coalition of people who share certain political interests. The second sense in which the word party may be understood refers to the party political arrangements and political party establishments. Wiredu (2001) holds that in any social set-up, any democratic political set-up, there will always be parties in the first sense. These parties will always naturally arise in accordance with how people's interests naturally coalesce. Further, a democratic dispensation will have to be seen to allow that parties in the first sense are allowed to thrive. However, for Wiredu, what is undesirable is that parties in the first sense grow into political parties in the second sense.

The question then is whether Wiredu's proscription of parties of the first sense turning into parties of the second sense makes his position similar to that of the nationalists? I suggest that the answer to this question will be found in Wiredu's 2001 essay which Lauer cites but does not discuss. In particular, Lauer chooses not to discuss the technical aspect of Wiredu's depiction of the nature of party arrangements. That part of the essay is very instructive in answering our questions.

But before dealing with that aspect of Wiredu's thinking I wish to state something that may strengthen the suspicion that Wiredu's non-party polity is similar to a one-party polity. Wiredu's sense of a party is so weak that it is merely equivalent to an identification of similar interests between different people. However, those interests may not be transformed into activities of political parties that will seek power to effect those interests at the exclusion of some other competing interests. The crux of the matter, in Wiredu's scheme, just like with its one-party variant, is that there is an absence of party political activity. The difference between Wiredu and single-party systems is that in Wiredu's account different interests may be recognised as legitimately existing realities but in a very weak sense of them being just interests that are there, but that should not be pursued beyond being merely recognised. The one-party system may claim that such interests can never be recognised because, primarily, they do not exist. As Jacques maintains, socialists are wont to claim that what exists as a supreme value is that there is an expression of unity in the vision of the party and what it stands for on behalf of all people. Despite these differences, the most important thing is that political party activity is absent in both schemes. With a one-party system such political party activity is either criminalised or persecuted into oblivion. With a non-party polity the need for parties is rendered irrelevant by the structure of consensus which ensures that there is no need for political activity as all people's wishes are genuinely taken care of by the form of representation which is retained under this democratic system. To the pragmatist the result or final outcome is the same since there is no party political activity in both scenarios. But as indicated above, Wiredu thinks that these systems are

seriously different in the sense that the one tends toward the abuse of power, the stifling of dissenting voices and the manipulation of ordinary people to satisfy the desires of the political elite. On the contrary, according to Wiredu (1997, 2001), a consensual system stands for a much more open system, one where dissent is allowed, where it can be openly expressed and where decisions are reached by taking into account all the various and competing arguments.

Even though this is the case that Wiredu claims, I suggest that we need to pay attention to two issues which may decide the case. The first issue is how true dissenters are treated in the consensual scheme. Let us suppose that there is a small but vociferous group of individuals who are no longer impressed by some aspect of the political community. These individuals make their unhappiness felt at all decision-making gatherings and forums. As they have eventually exhausted whatever political avenues available without any solution to their complaints they face the distinct possibility of being treated as a dangerous nuisance. Wiredu, in all his writings, does not offer a conceptual or historical description of how such a group may be treated. Although he is quick to point out that a chief could be destooled, he does not state what could happen to dissenters. Such an account is offered by Edward Wamala (2004) who, in his description of traditional Ganda society, notes that there was a tense relationship of avoidance between the single *mutaka* and the *ssabataka*. When this tension had reached a point of no return the single *mutaka* would physically withdraw from the *ssabataka's* rule. Although Wamala's point is to show that this threat of withdrawal served as a curb to the *ssabataka's* abuse of power, it also serves to show something else. It serves to show that the single *mutaka*, who, together with his people, were in disagreement with the *ssabataka* were ultimately left with no option but to remove themselves from the *ssabataka's* rule and land. What this shows is that there was a certain consensus which was acceptable to further the inherent communocratic nature of consensual societies and those who refused to abide by this consensus were only left with one option: to leave. This may give credence to those who suspect that consensus is nothing more than a ruse of majoritarianism in another form. If physical relocation is the only alternative left to unhappy dissenters then it is possibly the case that consensus is just as bad/good at treating those who disagree as a one-party polity is.

The second issue has to do with how political interests are reflected under a consensual dispensation. While above I have argued that Wiredu might be merely wrong in his construal of how those interests are made to coincide, there is a biting observation that comes from Emmanuel Eze. Eze (1997) notes that Wiredu equates right knowledge to right action. Since Wiredu argues that what secures consensus is the recognition that at the rock bottom there is an identity of interests, and what it takes is right knowledge to recognise this rock bottom, one

complication in relation to parties arises in this respect. Besides Eze questioning whether such a rock bottom exists and whether it could be in the interests of all, what needs to be developed is what those interests are and what resources are available to work them out. This is particularly problematic in diverse societies where individuals may not necessarily share the same value system.

But let us return to Wiredu's 2001 essay, wherein I suggest that we could find a lot of support for Jacques's hunch. Wiredu develops four senses of party. The first is what he refers to as party₁. This party is that of individuals conceived as having interests that coincide. This is the nature of parties that Wiredu approves of and finds inevitable even in consensual dispensations. The second sense of party is what Wiredu characterises as party₂. This is a decisional moment which all formerly in party₁ seek to be party to. The third sense is one he characterises as party₃. This is a moment of oppositional politics and he associates this moment as arising out of the failure of party₂. He also claims that this moment is one that is seen as consistent with the evils of party politics or oppositional politics. The final sense is one that he describes as party_{1,3}. This moment obtains when there is only one party that is dominant and has managed to transform itself into the only party that rules. He thinks this condition obtains under a dictatorial one-party system.

I suggest that anyone who wants to attack Wiredu's notion of party must look at this characterisation. I believe that this manner of characterising party systems is conceptually indefensible. Party₁ is not a political party or its equivalent and whatever its uses could be in a consensual dispensation, it can't be extended to show the conceptual irrelevance of political parties. Whatever party₁ is in a consensual dispensation, it can never go beyond what Wiredu depicts it as: a simple association of individual interests that have just happened to coincide. It cannot be extended to be a preferable moment to party₃ or party_{1,3}.

The reason for the failure of this extension, or the failure of the reliance on party₁ to condemn party₃ is that, conceptually, party₁ and party₃ are the same as they represent the idea of political association among individuals. The only difference between party₁ and party₃ is that the latter, in Wiredu's terminology, is recognised as a political party while the former is identified as an association of individuals with the same political interests. However, the difference is not that significant. With the notion of party₁, those who belong to that alliance still seek to influence the final decision, pretty much in the same way as those in party₃ also seek to influence the final decision. The only difference, according to Wiredu, is that party₃ seeks to exercise power at the exclusion of everyone else. But if it were to be the case that an instance of party₁ is given the opportunity to have its way all the time, I doubt if it would ever give up such an opportunity in favour of a more inclusive decision. Thus the only difference that exists between the notion of party₁ and party₃ is simply that Wiredu has assigned the former to

a consensual dispensation while at the same time assigning the latter to multi-party democracy.

Wiredu could respond by pointing out that the difference between party₁ and party₃ is authored by the systems within which they operate. He could insist that a consensual dispensation is radically different from an adversarial majoritarian dispensation. As a result, the argument could go that the parties that these systems retain would also be markedly different. I am afraid this move does not help Wiredu that much. The move only reiterates the difference between the two political systems, and not so much between the parties that operate within those systems.

Secondly, party₂ is just a matter of people coming to agree on an issue under discussion. It does not show that moments of decisional agreement are equal to the undesirability of political parties. In this respect there is a conceptual inconsistency in Wiredu. While party₁ and party₃ are constituted by people with real interests and real alliances, party₂ is only a decisional moment. While party₂ may involve various formations of party₁ coming to agree on a particular course of action, it (party₂) does not eliminate the preference, identity, and existence of party₁.

However, Wiredu attempts to use the decisional moment of party₂ as a recommendation of party₁'s ability or propensity to cooperate or arrive at consensus. By the same measure he condemns party₃ for its inability to come to the moment of being party₂ to a decision. But even if party₁ and party₃ were to work in the manner envisaged by Wiredu, that operation would hardly be evidence for the evils of party₃. Such an operation would merely be a demonstration of how differences are settled or how agreements are reached in a consensual dispensation. But most importantly, what happens if all instances of party₁ fail to resolve themselves into party₂? On Wiredu's account, do they become a condemnable instance of party₃? Or do they simply revert to party₁? Wamala's description of instances where consensus could not be obtained in traditional Ganda society shows that there were instances in which those in party₁ could not be resolved into party₂. As a result, some components of what was party₁ would physically withdraw from the kingdom and relocate to another place where they would never be party₂ to any decision. What this shows is that party₁ and party₃ are of the same hue, they take the defence of their interests seriously, and the notion of party₂ will not stop the pursuit of those interests.

Finally Wiredu's characterisation of political opposition parties as party_{1,3} does not even make sense on account of his own description of party₁, party₂, party₃, and party_{1,3}. Since party₁ is a coinciding moment of given interests, and party₃ is an actual political party, it is not entirely clear how moments of interests that

have crystallised into a political party₃ can then be seen as evil. There is nothing evil with party₁ and party₃ as stand-alone concepts and their combination cannot surely result in the evils attributed to party_{1,3}. The combination of party₁ with party₃ to form an evil hybrid of party_{1,3} is quite odd. If we trace the original representation that these subscripts were supposed to capture, we see that they were assigned to different polities. Party₁ was supposed to be the epitome of a consensual dispensation, and party₃ the epitome of an adversarial majoritarian multi-party system. Wiredu assigns to party₃ evils associated with oppositional politics. And to party₁ he assigns different political interests under a consensual dispensation that ultimately seek to be reconciled under decisional moments of party₂. What is clear is that not only do party₁ and party₃ belong to different polities but they also stand for two different things. However, on Wiredu's combination, the resultant party_{1,3} is deemed dictatorial. Wiredu's argument is based on the thinking that party₁ represents sectional interests, and party₃ represents sectional appropriation of power. Hence this new combination obtains.

However, this new combination is not compelling. By its very nature, if we stay with Wiredu's description, an instance of party₁ is not likely to combine with that of party₃. Party₁'s outlook is one that seeks reconciliation whereas party₃ seeks exercising power at the exclusion of others. In essence, while party₁ seeks to advance its political interests it does so in the broader context of reaching consensus. It is, therefore, inconceivable how these disparate entities could successfully combine to form an oppressive regime identified as party_{1,3}. In both their independent existence, party₁ and party₃ cannot be accused as being dictatorial in the same way that party_{1,3} turns out to be.

7. Conclusion

What I have sought to demonstrate is that there could be very good grounds to think that Wiredu's notion of a non-party polity is not that different from its one-party counterpart. I have also endeavoured to show that Wiredu's attempt to distinguish three senses of party by subscripts_{1,2,3} does not cohere. Additionally, I have sought to argue that the notion of party_{1,3} cannot be taken to represent a dictatorial polity. My analysis, I hope, makes it clear that there is need for a re-think about the nature and place of parties in a consensual dispensation.

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