

SOME PROBLEMS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ANALYSIS IN AFRICA.

by
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In this discussion, I hope simply to lay out a few brief problems of a conceptual sort which are of particular interest to the social scientist doing comparative political studies in Africa. I am not doing a paper on the specialized aspects of conciliar or administrative theory from a professional point of view, partly because I think the state of such theory in political science is encumbered with a large literature of rather weak standing, and partly because I doubt if it would be of particular interest here. Rather I am concerned with exploring some of the possible issues which come up when differing types of institutional arrangements for handling problems of social control are studied in differing cultures with differing limiting conditions. Hence the emphasis here is on the ways of defining a field of behaviour in terms which allow maximum illumination of the interdependence of sociological variables, while not producing a notion of politics as simply a reflex of those variables. When the problem of effective comparison is added to the problem of treating a behavioural field or cultural grouping in its control features, we find two crucial conceptual issues which are in need of clarification.

I find it not without interest that in recent years, more and more attention to instruments of social control showing specialized characteristics in that direction, are becoming the pre-occupation of anthropological studies. Mostly unencumbered by a knowledge of traditional political science, and indeed, not victimized by it, in a number of articles it is "the political system" which is regarded as the most crucial set of institutional structures for the integration and maintenance of a given society. It is regarded as the most generalized structure for the performance of control functions, and as an expression of generalized wants to be translated into legal and normative role prescriptions in all aspects of a given society. In this, the more traditional focus on family and lineage is modified by a newer focus on government as a set of non-nuclear instruments of social control, i.e. outside the immediate processes of family socialization, although not unrelated to them. One example of this is the leadership study itself where the emphasis on identification, recruitment, and determinants of leadership positions and leadership roles has built into it, I think, a larger question of social order in Buganda as a going system.

Let me state the two problems: The first is the problem of enunciating variables which pertain to specialized agencies of social control, other than those found in the nuclear family. The second is the effective comparison of those variables in functional terms. Such emphasis may involve the same unit any time or different units. The solution to these two problems, if indeed they can ever be solved in any long term sense, would be operational control by the researcher in political analysis leading to ceteris paribus treatment, or at least producing some predictability on the basis of knowledge of the consequences of variation limits. That these two problems themselves immediately involve us in enormous conceptual difficulties only serves to signify their practical significance.

I have phrased this discussion in terms of Africa partly because interest in them is why I choose to do research in Africa rather than elsewhere. The African scene allows an interesting basis for functional comparisons between widely differing types of systems which I have called traditional and secular, and which have either an indigenous source (as the contemporary world reckons history) or an alien one in which the features of specialization in control, rationality in criteria of performance, recruitment on the basis of merit are standardized features. The treatment of such widely differing approaches to social control when abstracted in pristine form allow a certain clarity when examining any empirical system in which a mixture has taken place. Taken together the dominant features of each can be lifted from their empirical and historical development into analytical juxtaposition with one another, the limits of their variation defined, and their functional and structural requirements empirically compared. The same thing can be done for traditional systems.

Problem I - The enunciating of variables which pertain to specialized agencies of social control (other than those found in the nuclear family).

A. The identification of agencies of authority:

In the United States, and to a much lesser extent in the United Kingdom political scientists are troubled by just what it is their discipline consists of. The term most appropriately used since Machiavelli has been power. Politics has been defined as the use and control of power (sometimes with the added consideration of influence thrown in both in redundant and gratuitous fashion). But, other difficulties with the notion of power aside, power comes into being as a consequence of certain ideas and institutional arrangements which pertain to unit maintenance, i.e. to the persistence (including in that modifications but not basic alterations) in a going society. Hence the first significant item about politics is that it is not simply a power mechanism but that it has specialized functions in the unit of which it is. It involves activities pertaining to the continuance of the system of which it is a part.

By phrasing politics in this fashion two general purposes are accomplished. On the one hand it avoids limiting the study of politics in formal structures of government. Rather those are included under a more general "control" rubric which might contain political systems having few explicitly defined concrete governmental formal structures. In other words, this would assume under a common analytical framework what have been commonly referred to by Firth, Brown and others as "state and non-state" systems. On the other hand we can avoid some of the difficulties of analysing governmental units as the concrete units from which to derive factors crucial to their own maintenance as units. The difficulty with the latter procedure is that one tends to find that what are at first glance analytical structures turn out to be organization requirements, i.e. the kinds of factors necessary to the maintenance of any explicit and hierarchical organization as a special type of social sub-system of which governmental structures are simply one example. In other words we don't care at this stage what generalized organizational requirements are but simply how certain control functions are handled by such organizations, whether or not they are specifically and consciously created for the task, or have come to perform those functions under some other guise. If the unit under discussion is a society this allows us to deal with politics first in its relation to society, i.e. in the functions it performs in society, and second in consequence of its control function, as the allocation of power and responsibility in a given system. Power is then put in its proper place as a derivative of control rather than a cause of control. It comes into being because of the need to keep social activity within bounds.

It must be pointed out that we are talking about systems having some basis of legal or consensual validity. We are not referring to cases where force is superimposed from an outside source. In that case, power is itself derived from a different unit. Power is still held to be derivative in the unit exercising domination but primarily where it is used to achieve a position of suzerainty by superior technology or other resources like manpower. The second derivative of social control, in addition to power, is legitimacy. This represents the normative approval of the agencies of control as well as setting the limits upon how this control shall be used and expressed. Legitimacy and power then are derivatives of effective social control.

These two derivatives taken together are commonly recognized as authority. Power without legitimacy is disruptive. Legitimacy without power is ineffective. Authority is a resultant of two sociological forces, therefore, which derive from the need for certain institutionalized mechanisms in any system for unit perpetuation. Government we can define as the ensemble of authoritative agencies responsible for the fulfillment of the structural requisites of a society, or sub-system thereof, depending upon the unit under discussion

The first step in the enunciation of variables then can be described as identifying first the authoritative agencies with which we may be concerned. Some of these may be hard to identify. Tracing the lines of power and legitimacy may help to identify authority centres which may ordinarily escape notice, or may be conspicuously absent in formal terms

Tracing lines of power and legitimacy as derivatives of social control itself raises the questions of how legitimacy is expressed. Is it phrased in terms of kinship mythology and lineage sanctity, or is it phrased in terms of categorical imperatives which stand by themselves: Thou shalt not kill, and what are the actual variations still regarded as right and proper, in actual behaviour, i.e. toleration in actual role behaviour. Lines of power and expressions of power can be regarded in terms of the types and forms of penalties and admonitions open to wielders of power roles, as combined in authority structures of various kinds. These may be predominantly religious, or they may take the form of prerogatives granted by land connections in order to settle disputes.

Hence in enunciating variables which pertain to specialized agencies of social control, we can first delineate the field of behaviour which we properly regard as these primarily concerned with social control, and identify discrete institutional arrangements.

B. Ideas by the use of this notion of authority.

The Derivation of Comparative Categories of Role Behaviour in Authority Structures. Having identified empirically, the authority structures one wishes to analyse two immediate difficulties present themselves. How much do the authority structures represent the specific application of generalized values of a system, i.e. the widely held expressions of legitimacy of most people which make control agencies possible, and secondly, how are these expressed within authority structures themselves. It is useful to develop role paradigms first of all of crucial roles in the system, in order to analyse the first. The welter of day to day relationships can then be codified in terms of dominant modes of behaviour. The way in which people ideally describe their relationships with one another can be compared with the way they actually do behave, and where control agencies are expected to crack down on deviants. This is the larger sociological job which needs to be done first. The second job is to focus more specifically on authority roles vis-a-vis their effective publics, i.e. the way in which people come into contact with control agencies either by giving them support, by allowing them to function as the symbolic expression of public wrath, and in the way in which they limit the forms of coercion and punishment, mandates and regulations, and above all act as agents and arbiters of the public choice. We can then find out the degree of reciprocity between generalized public values, and the authority structures themselves, and the degree of institutional freedom allowed to authority structures in their day to day operations.

The actual difficulties in research here are tremendous. Properly speaking it means getting a picture of the organized life of a community. The difficulties in what concepts to use in order to classify such data are also immense. It is on these levels that the work of Parsons, Levy, Weber, and others is of value, leaving alone the terminological difficulties found in their works.

What is necessary then is to organize paradigms of crucial relationships in a system generally, and authority structures vis-a-vis the public more specifically, and finally, between authority roles of which authority structures are composed. In this fashion the predominant determinants of behaviour can be abstracted out, i.e. generalized.

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In fact, in doing this for several different kinds of systems, it is possible to develop categories of polar types both on the more general sociological level, and on the more specific level of authority structures. Such behavioural polarities are what Parsons calls Pattern Variables, and Levy calls Analytical Aspects of Relationship Structures. The set which Levy has developed which includes such polarities as universalism and particularism has been developed on the basis of comparing industrial and non-industrial societies. Secular and traditional systems can be compared in so far as they exhibit sets or combinations of these polarities. A second set, for comparing traditional authority systems will be offered below.

To recapitulate for a moment: We have in Part I of this paper attempted to lay out a few notions which derive from the need for social control if a unit is to be perpetuated. We have said that the special characteristic of politics is that it is a specialised system of action having functions in regard to unit maintenance and employing authority structures, to achieve that end. Processes by which this takes place include decision-making and choice, the application of sanctions, directives, and coercion upon the members of the unit at large.

By identifying authority structures we can thereby identify the concrete organizations whereby these processes take place (such concrete organizations being called out) and the ends achieved (or not achieved as the case may be). We then went on to point out that these authority structures are themselves systems of action incorporating the larger values of the unit, and having specialized values summed up by the terms of legitimate power. These can be abstracted out of the paradigms of role behaviour in the system at large and in the authority structures being examined in terms of a) ideal patterns, and b) actual limits set on behaviour. If authority structures are operated beyond the limits of public sanction, legitimacy is withdrawn for at least some segments of the population. Power struggles may ensue, but on the other hand a new authority may come into being. Included in this notion of legitimacy are, of course structures of recruitment and circulation of the actual occupants of leadership roles

These ideal and actual patterns can be developed first for the kind of unit of which authority structures are a sub-unit, and for authority sub-units themselves in their relation to their public. At the level of comparative societies a set has been worked out for comparing industrial and non-industrial systems by Levy. Those pertaining to industrial systems are incorporated into the authority structures of the West, and are built into the civil service system and expressions of politics of the British as a colonial power. They contrast to those of almost all African indigenous systems in varying degrees.

1.

These pattern variables or AAofRS need to be broken down further if one is to get at differential responses to differing groups of people in Africa to Colonial authority systems: comparing traditional units, or comparing the same unit over a time. With respect to comparing traditional authority system such a set has been tentatively worked out. Consider two traditional societies like the Ibo and the Yoruba, or the Tallensi and the Ashanti, or the Kikuyu and the Baganda. Do their authority structures (keeping in mind that empirically such may be formalized governmental structures, or age-grading systems, segmented clan groupings or agnatic hierarchies having specialized trusteeship roles) incorporate predominantly one pole or the other of the following:

1. In terms of their relationship definition whether or not they are contractual and reciprocal, or predominantly non-contractual and non-reciprocal. In these terms, for example, the Ashanti would fall into the former category, while the Baganda would fall into the latter, excepting for clan structures.

2. In terms of stratification, i.e. the depth and breadth of public political participation in the hierarchy of a unit, as classified in groups whether or not it is extended or nuclear. Are authority roles layered or distributed widely throughout the unit, or are they localized within a small, specialized body. In the first instance the extreme can be viewed as the complete open and "Democratic" participation in decisions of an

Ashanti Division, compared with the narrowly restricted system in Buganda where the authority structure itself was comparatively small in extension, but having a wide network of agents for administrative purposes (or client chiefs as Fallers would call them). In this view such agents are merely employees of the authority unit, rather than participants. The Stratification Aspect as used here would thus be an index of participation in the exercise of legitimate power according to groupings to be empirically derived.

3. Membership Criteria, i.e. the degree of universalism and mobility found in a system and incorporated into authority structures. Specifically whether or not the system of recruitment is open or closed. Does one have to be specifically of a Royal lineage with matrilineal descent in order to be eligible for recruitment, as in Ashanti, or can one be from a number of large clans with certain types of personality and physical characteristics of major importance as among the Bulu of the Southern French Cameroons.

4. The predominant goal orientation aspect would attempt to compare systems on the basis of whether there is a predominantly self or societal orientation, the first perhaps again characteristic of the Baganda and the second of the Ashanti. What we get at here is the presence of service and group responsibility.

5. Affectivity or norms of emotionality permitted in a system. Are the members of the system noted for their highly charged personally intense relationships, or are they cool and remote with a view of the individual qua individual as relatively unimportant but rather attention paid to relations between office holders. Baganda former - Ashanti latter

6. Conition - are standards of belief predominantly cosmological, or instrumental. In the former instance cognitive modes are essentially religious. In the latter instance they are essentially magical. The precontact Baganda would probably be an example of the latter, while the Ashanti would be an example of the former.

The way these six factors cluster is of particular interest where there is a question of public receptivity to Western political forms. Presumably a system having contractual-reciprocal rights and obligations, with an extended stratification system, open recruitment, societal orientation, remoteness in affectivity, and predominantly cosmological in outlook would also involve a full blown political system which might not be alterable without destroying the entire fabric of society. On the other hand, Non-contractual-Nonreciprocal, Extended, open recruitment, self-orientation, and remote affect systems, with predominantly religious orientations might be far more adjustable to Indirect Rule, as was the case of the Muslem Emirates of Northern Nigeria and the Dagomba/Mamprussi and Moshi of the Gold Coast. These are crude speculations, but by looking at a whole range of traditional systems in these terms, it might be possible to refine these categories to the extent of mathematical values and scaling techniques for comparative purposes. Then, by evaluating such values in terms of their degree of incidence, possibly some index of likely receptivity to various kinds of alien political stimuli might be possible.

These then provide behavioural variables simultaneously part of the unit under discussion, whether a society, a village, or a "state", and the authority sub-structures found therein. We have not attempted to find specialised variables peculiar to the authority unit itself, although this would be particularly valuable.

Hence we have broken down the non-industrial complex of AAofRS¹ which Levy worked out, to a level more appropriate to comparative traditional systems, and the examination of authority structures in these

terms can be illuminating both for comparing types of behaviour in traditional systems, and between differing traditional behaviours in their response to that brought by the Europeans.

But while such variables, or a more fully worked out set of such variables, are useful in determining the implications of differing pattern of behaviour in authority systems, they say nothing about the functions which such systems perform. The attempt in part two of this paper will therefore be to enunciate a set of functional and structural requirements for authority systems. Such a set of requirements will do two things. It will identify concrete structures which handle legitimate power, i.e. help us to discover what the membership units are through which authority is exercised whether these be councils, administrative organs, religious groupings of one kind or another, segmentary lineages, etc. Secondly, such a set will help us to look for functional equivalents which may be hard to find. If we know that any authority system must involve a structure of coercion and punishment, or a structure of authoritative decision-making we may, in some circumstances be forced to look at separatist churches or a Tendana in Tallensi in order to find out how such structures are being concretely handled. If it can be found that a set of minimal requirements for authority structures can be developed, we will be able to get a fairly complete view of the way in which authority works.

II. The problem of effective functional comparison.

Getting a set of functional categories is a difficult proposition. For one thing it demands a considerable amount of empirical research before one can attempt to generalize common functional characteristics. It also demands first, getting a minimal list of things which must be done if authority structures are to maintain their maintenance role in a system.

An attempt will be made therefore to put forward a tentative set for discussion. It must be remembered that authority structures, as we have called them, are analytically conceived. That is to say they may be part of economic organizations, or religious organizations etc. What we have called the ensemble of authoritative agencies as they are determined in membership groups, represents "government" as we use the term. Government therefore represents concrete entities. Since it is convenient, when proceeding to find the necessary functions and structures of a unit, to deal with concrete rather than analytical structures, we shall therefore be attempting to find what can be called the functional and structural requisites of government.

We said earlier that a basic assumption about politics made here bears a special relation to the unit of which it is a part - i.e. a maintenance relation. If this assumption is accepted, then it is possible to treat politics in its dual aspect, the first in relation to the unit qua unit, and the second as a specialized sub-system of action.

Translating our assumption into functional terms let us take the most general membership unit possible, a society. It is particularly useful to take a "society" for several reasons which will not be discussed here, but one advantage of that unit is that an attempt has been made to derive its functional and structural requirements. Without going into this in any detail, let us assume that in the welter of day to day activities and institutions in any society five structural features can be abstracted which in one way or another indicate the means by which the society is perpetuated, let us call these structures, structural requisites, the name Levy has given to them. According to Levy there are five structural requisites in any society, 1. political allocation, 2. solidarity, 3. economic allocation, 4. role differentiation, 5. integration and expression.

In terms of our assumption about the relation of politics to the unit of which it is a part we can then say, the structural requisites of any society are the functional requisites of government. The five structures necessary for the maintenance of a society provide the work load of government, and governmental agencies are designed to allow that work load to be achieved. In effect, those five factors are to politics the necessary things which a political system must in some way treat and handle.

If we are correct so far, then what have now become the functional requisites of government must be satisfied in terms of a minimal set of structures. The following is offered as a tentative list: 1. The structure of authoritative decision-making, i.e. patterns of policy choice, and determination, policy administration, including patterns of government organization and regularized procedures. 2. The structure of coercion and punishment, i.e. patterns of control over disruptive behaviour and external threats; adjudication and arbitration. 3. The structure of accountability and consent, i.e. patterns of representation, public participation, consensus-maintenance, and elite accountability. 4. The structure of resource determination and regulation, i.e. patterns of control over distribution and use of land, labour and capital; patterns of tribute and revenue assessment, collection and allocation. 5. The structure of political recruitment and role definition, i.e. patterns of elite recruitment and reward, patterns of role definition, allocation and integration.

This provides us with a set of categories which are presumed to apply to politics generally in relation to society. From such a set it is possible to find, first of all the kinds of empirical units which will handle these varied structures, and treat them in their various aspects. Some agencies might turn out to be highly specialized. The structure of accountability and consent might include an elaborate conciliar system with large representation and wide participation. It might on the other hand involve a type of system with few councils and a balance of accountability to the ancestors as translated through the figure of a priest. Often what appear as ad hoc or extra-curricula vehicles of politics, turn out to be in fact the major ways in which political recruitment, for example and role definition may be treated in a given society. The Syndicate in Chicago, and the Committee on Youth Organizations in Ashanti which have certain features in common including the use of gangsters and illegal practices, both might well turn out to be crucial participants in government both unfortunately, in the structure of authoritative decision-making.

By using such an approach, some very diverse kinds of materials can be effectively compared, even though their institutional and historical settings may have been vastly different. In these terms it is my hope that a study of Uganda Politics will make meaningful comparison with that of the Gold Coast. Two totally different kinds of systems can be compared, first in terms of their behavioural variables, Buganda compared with Ashanti, for example, Acholi with the Northern Territories perhaps. At the societal level, this demands properly a whole team of research workers of a variety of disciplines. The functional approach makes possible a meaningful pooling of data. At the level of comparative politics, it allows political scientists to make use of such data, while carrying on specialized studies of comparative politics of his own.

Two dimensions are used by the political scientist himself. The behavioural dimension measured by the variables enunciated in the first part of this discussion, and the structural dimension which enunciates both the functions of politics, and the ways in which apparently diverse bits of human activity fit together in a society as a going system.

However, not only can different types of political systems be compared, but the same system over time. In this sense both historical and contemporary political comparisons should be possible, assuming that historical data is sufficient and available.



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