
UNIT 7 ADMINISTRATION, MILITARY AND POLITICAL PARTIES

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

African nationalists sought state power in an effort to transfer control of political office and economic resources from the colonisers to the people of their countries. The state, they believed, would bring development to Africa. Nationalists mobilised political support to establish their claims to be the authentic representatives of the people.

The state was central to achieving the goals of nationalism and development. It was the object of the struggle for the continuing battle to maintain power. With the dawn of Independence, African leaders faced a daunting task of meeting the social and economic needs of the people. In the early decades, African states had been buffeted by popular pressures to live up to the ideals of democratic governance and the promise of economic development that were implicit as well as the stated assumptions guiding the struggle for an independent political kingdom. This excitement, however, was not to last long as so many African countries were later to find out. The government structures inherited by independent governments were weak and lacked sustainable capacity. However, governments were called upon to provide social services and develop the economic infrastructure. The constitutions that were developed for the newly independent countries were different from the political systems developed by the colonial state. In less than a decade since Independence, the various constitutional arrangements bequeathed by the erstwhile colonial rulers to their successors underwent such vast and frequent changes as to make them largely unrecognisable. Most African polities except where the military had stepped in continue to have such institutions as the executive and legislative bodies, organised parties and associations, apparatuses of territorial administration, judiciary and even institutions of local government, but the functioning has little relevance to the definitions, as we know them.

Over time the administration, military and political parties have undergone distinct changes in their role and character. In this Unit we will discuss these three institutions.

7.2 ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

The present African administrative system had its origins in the colonial system. But the administration in Anglophone Africa differed from that of the Francophone states, as their administrative machinery was different. The Civil Service structure in Francophone Africa was as coarse as its British

counterpart was gentle. These differences are attributed to differing national traditions of the services; Britain believed in local rule while France practised centralisation. Britain relied on Lord Lugard's philosophy of indirect rule; it held that the most appropriate way to administer the newly acquired territories was to operate through existing political authorities rather than to act directly upon the people.

In contrast, the philosophy of direct rule, which was France's, minimised the importance of existing political organisations. The paradigm for this essentially French conception was a bureaucratic state in which officials were appointed at every level, each level being related in a hierarchical pattern to the level above and ultimately to the Imperial Government itself. Thus the Governor General of the French African states, for instance, was subject to control from Paris through the Governors of the individual territories, through the appointed *commandant de cercle*, to the appointed *chef de canton* and *chef de village*. Orders went down the line of command and there was little feedback, or room for initiative. All African administrations were dependent to a greater or lesser extent on the use of native authorities as agencies of local rule. The main difference between the French and British policies of imperial rule lay in the fact that while the French practiced assimilationist policies, designed to create black Frenchmen, there was never any thought of assimilation in the minds of British policy makers. They were different in the imperial days and their differences have been carried over into the post-Independence period. However on the eve of the Second World War the two systems began to resemble each other.

In the post-Independence period three calculations of African politics influenced the administrative machinery. First the tendency towards greater concentration of power at the territorial centre, which reduced the traditional autonomy of the local constituents. The second tendency was the vast expansion of executive powers dwarfing thereby the importance of other organised institutions. The common feature was concentration of powers in the executive represented either by a single individual, a group or a combination of representatives from different segments of society. The third tendency had been imposition of one-party rule through legal constitutional or other means. It goes without saying that these tendencies overlapped and interspersed with one another. These tendencies resulted in an administrative structure, which was highly centralised. The bureaucratic structure is unified and exclusively accountable to the central government. It undermined the role and significance of local government, including ethnically related groups as well as modern institutions of true local government.

Over the years the post-colonial administration has been posited with many challenges and crisis. The social, economic and political crisis of post-Independence sub-Saharan Africa can be largely attributed to a crisis of institutions, resulting from a structural disconnection between the indigenous institutions and management practices. The crisis created a crisis of legitimacy and accountability affecting the performance of public administration. The crisis had an impact on the bureaucracies. It led to privatisation of public resources and state displacement. Another problem in African bureaucracies is the prevailing widespread corruption. Post-colonial administration has thus come under pressure for change. Presently, the structure of the administration has moved from centralisation to decentralisation and currently to a preference to what is called "decentralised federalism". Public policy and planning has also evolved towards change. Centralised planning and uniform policy-making has given way to regional planning and is currently under siege by those who have called for decentralised, regional federalism. Lately, this has led to demands for democracy and associational freedom. Administration in post-Independent Africa has undergone change in its structure as well as in its functioning moving from centralisation to decentralisation.

7.3 MILITARY IN POLITICS

To begin with it can be said with a measure of certainty that in the course of a decade the African military had come to be deeply involved in politics. However, it is difficult to identify any distinct patterns in its behaviour. Sometimes, the armed forces struck by way of a coup in order to put out of existence an arbitrary and corrupt regime, at others, it simply stepped in because there was a political vacuum, which the politicians failed to fill. And yet in some cases leaders of the armed forces were themselves divided as to whether or not they should intervene. Further, whatever, may have been the original intentions of the coup leaders, it would appear that once the military violates its norm of keeping aloof from politics, it finds itself more or less permanently enmeshed in non-military affairs. In this section we will be discussing character, performance, achievements and theories advanced in regard to the ascendancy of the military in African politics.

Two theories or arguments are popular in regard to military intervention. One is the "theory of a contagion" which believes that occurrence of a *coup* in one territory may start a chain reaction in other territories. Another is the "theory of conspiracy". This argument sees sinister imperialist motives behind the overthrow of civilian governments. However, not all *coups* can be explained by these two theories. In view of the complexity of circumstances and the motives and opportunities governing the action of the men of the armed forces, it would be futile to search for a unified explanation of *coups d'etat* in Africa.

It would not be out of place to state here that few African states inherited large-sized armies from colonial powers. It was not until very late in the colonial period that efforts were made to train Africans for appointment to commissioned ranks. At Independence, pressures for 'africanising' the higher ranks in the armed forces were felt in almost every country. After Independence the new African governments introduced crash programmes to expand the size of their armies and to provide better training facilities and salary scales to all grades of the armed forces. Along with this, 'africanisation' of the superior grades in the military proceeded with rapidity. From the point of view of the structure of the armed forces, this had three important implications. First, it contributed to the feeling of relative deprivation among the middle ranking officers. Second, the unbalanced age structure tended to weaken established patterns of discipline. Third, the relatively command positions in the armed forces came to be occupied by these junior officers at an early age, thus developing in them qualities of initiative to an unusual extent. In simple words, these officers had both the motivation and the opportunity to act swiftly in times of crisis. A careful analysis of the *coup d'etat* would show that factors relating to the internal organisation of the armies played as important a role in governing the action of soldiers as the external factors. Successful accomplishment of a coup quite often resulted in the elimination of not only professional politicians but also senior army officers.

Once in power, the military *juntas* proceeded to make special provisions for the armed personnel. For routine administration the army rulers tended to depend heavily on the civil servants who welcomed the change partly because it promised an end to the tiresome interference of politicians in their work. Meanwhile, the administrative apparatus presided over by the military came to resemble more and more the colonial model. There has thus been an over-emphasis on centralisation with greater reliance on the bureaucracy to run the affairs of the state. At the local level, chiefly authorities were resurrected in order apparently to promote decentralisation, but in reality to forge alliance with the rural elites,

Despite extensive powers army men failed to rectify the problems that they usually blamed on the politicians. Instead of rooting out corruption they in some ways abetted it. Thus the performance of the military belies the hope that they can bring about any substantial improvement in either the administration or society. Their prime concern has been the preservation of their own hegemony as a privileged group. Further, in the process of their growing entanglement in the state politics, the armies themselves began to show signs of cracks in their organisation. Their character underwent drastic changes; discipline became lax and in some cases affected the army ranks. In the long-run, the military as an institution, though not in terms of numbers or perquisites, suffered most under military rule.

7.4 POLITICAL PARTIES

In the early phases of colonial rule philanthropists who propagated building their own cultural associations prevented the formation of political parties. So the basic foundation of the political party was the association of tribes formed for the preservation of their culture and tribal traditions. These associations were started generally in the urban areas where people had migrated. But most of these organisations were movements and not parties. Later, when anti-colonialism acquired momentum, the need to unite people against colonialism emerged. Traditional elites i.e. the chiefs, new elites, and educated people then formed political parties. The parties formed were however not based on any ideology; anti-colonialism was its main objective.

After Independence most of the newly emergent states moved towards one-party rule. The single party was built i) the charisma of the leader; ii) capacity to mobilise people to show strength; iii) methods of organising political groups; and iv) life membership of the party approved by the leader, i.e., one could contest elections but by remaining under the single state. It is at this point that we should examine the relations between the party and the administration as also parties' role in the evolving political order.

Political parties in Africa were not strong monolithic organisations. Rather the party represented a conglomeration of local and regional groups, which had — apart from sharing the fruits of power — little else in common. They were unable to raise an active group of cadres, which could act as the vanguard of a revolutionary movement when parties should represent mass organisations.

The question that arises here is that can such parties ever become a body of determined men and women who would rise above parochial and divisive forces and impose their iron will on society? The question indeed raises a number of unresolved issues. On the one hand, it is maintained that mass single parties are necessary in order to direct and mobilise national resources; on the other, it appears as though they are solely engaged in mobilising support on the widest scale in order to provide security to the political leadership. The two aims are contradictory; if the aim is to mobilise the nation to achieve certain economic and social goals, the party must become then an initiator of change, but if the aim is to merely preserve the existing political order, the party cannot perform any role other than that of an appendage of administration.

Keeping this in mind we may now examine the role political parties perform in a single party system. Given the language of African politics, it can be explained why at one time African leaders regarded parties as the most important vehicle of political and social change. First and foremost,

the party represented a common front of the subject peoples against colonial rule. Secondly, whereas the party was an original handiwork of the nationalist leaders, the administrative structure inherited from the colonisers was regarded as unreliable. Thirdly, in order to 'africanise' the administration, the party came to be treated as a reserve from which new recruits could be drawn. The party appeared more dependable than the administration.

To build the post-colonial order the rulers assigned a multiplicity of tasks to the party. They supervised, controlled and coordinated all instruments of government, supplied individual and communal incentives for development; trained both adults and children for citizenship in the new nation; acted as the major channel of communication between the leaders and the population and between the centre and the localities, both downward by instructing the population concerning decisions, programmes and tasks, and upwards in securing for the leaders necessary information and support. In short, the party became co-terminus with the state. In those states characterised as "revolutionary centralising", there was a greater emphasis on the mobilising role of the party. But in other states such as the Ivory Coast and Kenya, where the party system remained outside competition, there was by and large no such emphasis.

Finally in a one-party state, the parties began to lose its former *raison d'être*, gaining a new one that of survival. With the induction of its able cadre into the government, parties generally lost their original vitality. They have remained adjuncts of government, instead of representing any alternative instrument for transforming societies,

When the multi-party system was recreated in Africa after the 1980s as a result of IMF pressure and SAPs, in order to usher in democracy, various political parties emerged having ethnic, tribal and regional affinities. With the rise of different political parties, competition has grown to hold on to state power and the national resources. Parties generally based on a narrow class or ethnic grouping are not concerned with national integration and far-reaching social change. Thus political parties, whether in a single party or a multiparty system are characteristically attracted to material rewards rather than enthusiasm for political principles.

7.5 SUMMARY

In this Unit we have discussed the structure, the process of administration and the changes that African administration underwent after independence. Post-Independence developments failed to support the ideals of democratic governance. Institutions like the military, the political parties and the administration in Africa have been in a fluid state. After Independence, executive power of the administration in Africa has expanded showing a tendency towards concentration of powers at the centre, reducing the traditional autonomy of local constituents and the imposition of one party rule. Presently, the administration is moving towards decentralised federalism.

The military has been deeply involved in politics and stepped in to displace a corrupt or arbitrary regime or to fill a vacuum but failed to rectify problems that were blamed on politicians,

Political parties were formed to unite people against colonialism and were not based on ideology though inclined to socialism. It was only after independence though that states moved towards a one-party rule. They became representatives of governments instead of representing an alternative

instrument for change in society. In spite of the recreation of the multi-party system in Africa, parties now represent a narrow class or ethnic group and are still not concerned with change at a national level or political principles.

7.6 EXERCISES

- 1) Analyse the differences and the similarities in the Anglophone and Francophone administrative systems'?
- 2) What changes has the African administration undergone in the post-Independence period?
- 3) Describe the character of military rule in Africa? Does it differ from civilian rule?
- 4) Describe the emergence and growth of political parties in Africa?
- 5) Examine the role political parties perform in a single party system?