Kwasi Wiredu's consensual democracy and one-party polities in Africa

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How justified are those who think that the clamour for one-party politics in Africa was inspired by the character of African consensual democracy such as the one defended by Kwasi Wiredu? I show that though Wiredu's consensual democracy may share some similarities with a one-party polity, it does not necessarily follow that it has inspired the emergence of one-party polities in Africa. Similarly, the absence of any discernible similarities between African consensual democracy and one-party polity may not also necessarily entail that the former has not inspired the latter. When one considers the ontological nature of Wiredu's consensual democracy and the one-party polity, it becomes contentious to claim that the latter emerges from the former. However, based on Wiredu's idea of consensual democracy, one might argue that consensual democracy has a common ancestry with a one-party polity because they both seem to emerge from "party$_1$".

Introduction

This paper seeks to bring into perspective the assumption that the character of African consensual democracy inspired the emergence of one-party polities in some parts of Africa (Sklar 1983; Mafeje 1992; Ezeanyika 2011). Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu (1995; 1997; 2007) rejects such insinuations based on the different ontological natures[1] of these parties and their pragmatic operations. In this connection, I show that though the idea of African consensual democracy such as the one articulated by Wiredu (1995; 1997) may have some similarities with a one-party polity, it does not necessarily follow that it inspires its emergence in Africa.

Wiredu (1995; 1997; 2001) himself notes the implied attempts to project the idea of one-party polity as subsisting in and emerging from the African paradigm of consensual democracy.[2] Based on the supposed lack of any significant commonalities between the consensual polity and the one-party polity as shown by their different ontological natures, Wiredu (1997) rejects the claim that the one-party polity has its ancestry in African consensual polity.[3] In this connection, Wiredu (1995; 1997) can be commended for plausibly challenging the attempts at associating one-party polity and

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1   In the light of the substantial differences of the respective natures and essences of Wiredu's idea of consensual democracy and the one-party polity, it would appear contestable to claim that the two are indistinguishable, let alone that the latter emerges from the former. The greater part of this paper is devoted to defending the distinctions between these two polities.

2   The reference to "African consensual democracy" is not intended to portray Africa as a homogenous entity and with exactly the same, homogenous style of democracy. However, it might not be farfetched to claim that consensus-seeking was and is still widely pursued in African governance issues (Wiredu 1997).

3   It can hardly be contested that the African consensual polity and the one-party polity share similarities. However, what is important is how such similarities could be construed. Can the prevailing similarities between the two paradigms of democracy be taken as entailing that one emerges from the other? I would like to think that this could not be an authentic basis for asserting or even denying the African ancestry of one-party polity. As I see it, even if it were to be established that the consensual polity and the one-party polity share significant commonalities, these could not be sufficient grounds to conclude that the one-party polity has its ancestry in African consensual polity. In this connection, it might be necessary for those who want to situate the one-party polity in African consensual polity to offer a plausible account of how the former has ancestry in the latter. In the same vein, those who deny the African origin of the one-party polity, such as Wiredu (1997), ought also to furnish the reasons why it is objectionable to claim that the one-party polity has an African ancestry. One reason could be that these two modes of democracy are strange bedfellows by essence.

the consensual polity. Yet, as I see it, Wiredu (1997) does not seem to engage pointedly with the suspicion that one-party polities in Africa have an African origin besides his attempts to show, by way of comparisons of their ontological natures, that the two modes of polities are polar opposites. In my own opinion, by taking this approach to the suspicions of one-party polities' African origins, Wiredu (1997) does not seem to succeed in proving that the one-party polity is alien to African political culture.

Lack of substantive similarities between African consensual polity and a one-party polity may not necessarily ward off suspicions of the emergence of the latter from the former. I will, however, argue that the two modes of governance seem to have a common ancestry in that they emerge from what Wiredu (2007, 165) calls "party$_1$". However, party$_1$ might reasonably be taken as a rudimentary phase in deliberations that may eventually lead to the attainment of consensus when these parties commit themselves to being party to such deliberations. However, parties falling under party$_1$ do not embody the idea of consensual polity that Wiredu (2007) defends. In this way, it would seem that the one-party polity has some connections with party$_1$ and not with a consensual polity as critics of Wiredu (2007) often allege.

This paper has three sections. I start with a brief overview of Wiredu's (1995; 1997) account of consensual democracy. In the second section, I choose certain parts of Wiredu's (1995; 1997) argument for special focus, especially where he tries to show that consensual democracy is fundamentally different from a one-party polity often contentiously considered as having its ancestry in African consensual democracy. Thereafter, I defend Wiredu's (1997) consensual democracy from the claims of critics that the one-party polity could reasonably be said to emerge from consensual democracy. I argue that though the suspicions of the African ancestry of the one-party polity are to a certain degree plausible, there is a sense in which the one-party polity is confused with the consensual polity in construing the former as having ancestry in the latter. In the last section, I argue that though Wiredu (1997) denies the possible African ancestry of one-party polity, the way he explains his idea of parties cannot be completely absolved of creating some grounds for the possible emergence of one-party polity. I now turn to a brief outline of Wiredu's (1997) idea of consensual democracy.

Wiredu's idea of consensual democracy

In an essay titled "Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional[4] Politics: A Plea for a Non-party Polity", Wiredu (1995; 1997) offers a strong defence for a return to what he calls "consensual democracy" or "democracy by consensus" in Africa: a political system that dates back to pre-colonial Africa[5] (Wiredu 2007). This political system hinges on seeking consent of people through what Wiredu (2011, 1058) regards as "legitimate means", meaning consent obtained through persuasion. Fundamentally, it involves compromise where "compromise is a certain adjustment of the interests of individuals (in the form of disparate convictions as to what is to be done) to the common necessity for something to be done" (ibid.) Consensus-seeking presupposes the existence of contestations and disputes. In this connection, Wiredu (1995) accepts that conflicts in Africa

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4   In this paper, I will use the term "traditional" with caution for the reason that it might be interpreted in pejorative ways especially given that Wiredu (1997) use it to denote a "past" practice. One contestable sense in which the term "traditional" has often been deployed pertains to its characterisation as an antithesis of "modernity". In this sense, the term "tradition" is used to denote that which is unchanging, backward and unscientific, while the term "modernity", contestably identified with the Euro-Western world, is understood as that stage of human development characterised by scientific thinking and progress (Gyekye 1997). Contrary to attempts to present "tradition" and "modernity" as polar opposites that are completely unrelated, there is a sense in which that which is considered "modern" today transforms into "tradition" with time and that which is "traditional" will remain evident in the "modern". The understanding of "tradition/traditional" as fixated in the past or as some fossilised reality become contestable. As David Gross (1992, 4) argues, "many traditions continue on in the nooks and crannies of the modern life". Nevertheless, because of some negative connotations that the terms "tradition/traditional" has attracted when used in reference to Africa, I use it with caution.

5   Wiredu (2011) does not deny the existence of other political systems other than those of a consensual disposition in Africa. He actually notes that despotic communalist states existed in Africa. Wiredu (2011) explains that his choice of consensual democracy as a political system that could be appealed to in constructing a contemporary political system anchored on consensus derives from the fact that human nature is disposed to learn from better examples. Consensual democracy of Africa's past is one such good example of a political system that could inspire the construction of a present-day consensual polity.

were common. However, issues were resolved leading to the attainment of reconciliation, which in fact is a form of consensus. To attain this consensus, deliberations were extensively pursued leading ultimately to consensual positions. Dialogue and persuasion enabled people to overcome their disagreements and attain agreed positions.

Consensus-seeking is highly regard such that "it is well known that traditional Africans generally, if perhaps not universally, placed such a high value on consensus in deliberations regarding interpersonal projects that their elders would sit under the big trees and talk until they agree" (Wiredu 2011, 1057). As Wiredu (2011) explains, the consensus attained through deliberations concerned what is to be done and not what ought to or ought not to be done or what is true or false. In attaining such consensus, a non-party system is employed in the sense that the system does not involve political parties in the form of entities that compete in order to determine the party that ascends to power, while the losing ones are left out of power.

However, by non-party system, Wiredu (1995; 2011) is not proscribing the existence of parties in a consensual polity per se. The difference is that special-type parties in a consensual polity participate in governance, while those in a majoritarian democracy compete to establish one that ascends to power. Wiredu (2011) thinks that such a political system could as well be relevant in informing the construction of a political system that is relevant to the present configuration of countries in Africa. As Wiredu (2011, 1064) argues, "there is no reason why peoples who in the not very distant past worked a political system based on consensus cannot work out an analogous one in present conditions".

However, in defending a possible return to a non-party political system in Africa, Wiredu (2011) is aware of attempts that have been made by those who have the intention to create a one-party political system to justify this move on the grounds that it is informed by the non-party polity that has been in use in Africa. In fact, Wiredu (2011, 1065) dissociates himself from these endeavours when he avers that

> I would like to dissociate myself from any concealed hankering after a one-party system. This is especially necessary since some politicians in power wishing to create a one-party situation without a one-party designation have been known to use the banner of the non-party idea. The fundamental difference between a non-party system and a one-party one is that the former embraces the freedom of political association while the latter execrates it.

In fact, Wiredu (1997) thinks that the one-party polity does not have ancestry in African consensual democracy. In addition, any attempts to compare these two political formations yield an illusory analogy (Wiredu 1995; 1997). However, one positive thing that Wiredu (1997, 308) picks from the averments of one-party defenders that he alternatively calls "one-party persuaders" is that democracy can also subsist in other political systems other than the much-touted multiparty system (see Nyerere 1961).

Non-party polity and one-party polity distinguished
In calling for a return to consensual democracy, Wiredu (1995; 1997) might have found something attractive about this paradigm of democracy that appears not to wield so much weight and importance in Western-style multi-party majoritarian democracy that is used in countries in Africa.[6] One such positive attribute of consensual democracy is the element of inclusivity in decision-making processes, where representation of various segments of society is a prerequisite in governance issues (Tangwa 2011; Gyekye 2013). This representation pertains to both the composition of organs that make decisions and in the decision processes and outcomes (Wiredu 1995; 1997). Since consensual democracy does not seem to exclude anyone from decision processes in government, decisions made may not offend anyone since "all" are represented in government and their input is considered

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6   Consensus-seeking is not solely found in African consensual democracy (Wiredu 2007). It is a component of other forms of democracy. Though some form of consensus subsists in Western-style democracy, presently evidenced by efforts to find some common grounds between the European Union and Britain in the Brexit negotiations where Britain is planning to leave this union of nations, its degree of centrality and importance may not be comparable to a predominantly consensual democracy that Wiredu (1997; 2007) defends.

seriously in decisional processes.

Nevertheless, Wiredu (1997) notes that African leaders, such as former presidents of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, and of Tanzania, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, have cited consensual democracy in their defence of a one-party polity (see Mafeje 1992). In reference to these two former presidents' attempt to lend support for a one-party polity by appealing to consensual democracy, Wiredu (1997, 303) notes that "ironically, both pronouncements were made in the course of a defence of one-party system" in Africa. By this statement, Wiredu (1997) is projecting his perception of the attempts in some quarters to defend a one-party polity using consensual democracy. As I see it, Wiredu (1997) seems to show aversion for the manipulation of the tenets of consensual democracy in order to legitimise a one-party polity in Africa. It could also be an indication of the implausibility of legitimising one-party polities by appealing to its assumed connection to African consensual democracy.

Wiredu's (1997) denial of the African ancestry of a one-party polity ought to be understood in the context of his discussion of the relationship between multi-party democracy and consensual democracy. For this reason, it is necessary to present a summary of Wiredu's (2007) comparison of multi-party democracy and consensual democracy that lends him the opportunity to digress and react to the tendency of defenders of one party polity (see Nyerere 1961; Nkrumah 1973) to consider it as having African ancestry. Wiredu (2007) regards multi-party majoritarian democracy as a system that is based on the majority principle where parties engage in fierce competition in order to attain state power. Wiredu (1997, 308) calls such systems of democracy "majoritarian democracies" because "parties under this scheme of political things are organizations of people of similar tendencies and aspirations with the sole aim of gaining power for the implementation of their policies". The jostling to ascend to power among political parties is, politically, a matter of life and death because the parties that lose elections are excluded from the decision-making organs and processes of government (Gyekye 2013). Being an election loser is a miserable state to be in for any of the political parties vying for political office (Wiredu 2007). As a result, no political party is willing to lose elections. Oftentimes, political parties take some actions to win elections "at all costs", such as violence and election rigging.

Having noted the problems associated with majoritarian democracy, Wiredu (1997) thinks that "consensual democracy" could be a reasonable and plausible alternative that African countries and peoples ought to use to construct their systems. The return to consensual democracy might have been considered unproblematic perhaps because it is a system of democracy that was widely in use and indeed acceptable in Africa prior to its replacement with Western-style multi-party majoritarian democracy (Wiredu 1997; 2011). Taking the system of governance of the Ashanti people of Ghana as a point of reference of an African example of democracy, Wiredu (1997) regards the Ashanti political system as consensual. By definition and practice

> it was a democracy because government was by consent, and subject to the control, of the people as expressed through their representatives. It was consensual because, at least as a rule, that consent was negotiated on the principle of consensus. (By contrast, the majoritarian system might be said to be, in principle, based on "consent" without consensus.) (Wiredu 1997, 308).

"Consent" without "consensus" could be interpreted to mean "agreed" positions that are not an outcome of consensus-bearing deliberations. In order for the "consent" to be an outcome of consensus, the representatives of different segments of people in the state ought to take active part or be represented in negotiations that produce authentic consensual outcomes. As such, no one will feel aggrieved and excluded from the organs that make decisions and the actual decision processes because at least everyone is represented and their concerns are considered. This makes consensual democracy more attractive than majoritarian democracy because it tries to ensure that everyone is represented in the decision-making process[7] (Lauer 2007). The situation is said to be different

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7   Emmanuel Chukudi Eze (1997, 321; emphasis in original) thinks that an authentic democracy ought to be "a market place of *competing*
    – not just consenting or consensing – ideas". As such, democracy ought not to be limited "to one moment of its outcomes: decisional

when it comes to majoritarian democracy because "consent" is attained not through a negotiated consensual process, but based on the prevailing dominance of the governing party. Such a model of democracy has the infamy of excluding political parties that are not in power from the decision-making processes of government.

In this connection, Wiredu (2007) employs the term "party" or "parties" in order to show that there is a sharp distinction between consensual democracy and majoritarian democracy. For Wiredu (2007), consensual democracy does not have "parties" in the sense in which they are conceived in multi-party majoritarian democracies. In substantiating the distinction between majoritarian democracy and consensual democracy, Wiredu (1997, 308) argues that

> the sense in which the system in question [consensual democracy] did not feature parties is that none of the groups mentioned organized themselves for the purpose of gaining power in a way which entailed others not being in power or, worse, being out of it. For all concerned, the system was set up for participation in power, not its appropriation, and the underlying philosophy was one of cooperation, not confrontation.

What can be discerned here is that though "parties" exist in consensual democracy and multi-party majoritarian democracy, their import and ontological natures are fundamentally different. Whereas in majoritarian democracy, parties are engaged in competition to ascend to positions of power in the state, in the case of consensual democracy, "parties" participate in the governance issues. In other words, majoritarian democracy involves competition of "parties" to win elections and ascend to power, while consensual democracy involves participation of "parties" in governance issues. Though desirable and ideal, this maximalist understanding of democracy as reflected in consensual democracy may be difficult to attain in real-life situations (Wiredu 2007).

The apparent implication of Wiredu's (1997) distaste for "parties" as they are conceived in majoritarian democracy and preference for a consensual dispensation as captured in the title of his seminal work has often been loosely understood to imply that his idea of consensual democracy does not have room for "parties" as conceived in Western-style democracy. Though, in this work, Wiredu (1997) tries to clarify that "parties" that take part in deliberations are fundamentally different from those that jostle for electoral victories in a multi-party majoritarian democracy, he undertakes to clarify further the contentious issue of "parties" in a consensual democracy paradigm in his work titled "Democracy by Consensus: Some Conceptual Considerations" (2007).

In clarifying further, the different senses of the term "party" used to describe political entities in consensual democracy and majoritarian democracy, Wiredu (2007, 164) states that

> in its first occurrence it means an individual or group of individuals with an interest or concern for a given issue or project. In the second it is used adjectivally to mean being a participant in the making of a decision, and in the third it is used in the well-known political sense in which a party is a group of people, basically of one mind, organized with the aim of winning governmental power.

As such, Wiredu's (2001) preferred option of consensual democracy could be understood as a dispensation that has "parties" that are "party" to or that "participate" in the decision-making process in government, as opposed to "parties" that jostle for the purposes of appropriating political power. Yet, despite the effort to clarify the different meanings of the term "parties" when used in reference to political entities in a consensual democracy on the one hand, and majoritarian democracy on the other, the use of such a term remains subject to contestations. For instance, in the work titled "The Nature of Opposition in Kwasi Wiredu's Democracy by Consensus", Bernard Matolino (2013) regards Wiredu's attempts at clarifying further the different senses in which he uses the term "party" as largely unconvincing and unmerited. I critically engage Matolino's (2013) argument in the second part of this paper.

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representation or consensus" (Eze 1997, 321), yet neglecting the importance of respecting diversity of opinions. However, for Lauer (2012b), Eze's (1997) idea of democracy is already captured in consensual polity's deliberative consultation wherein individuals are allowed to freely express themselves.

Wiredu (1997) notes that the apparent lack of "parties" in his consensual dispensation that compete to wield power for their own purposes has often been erroneously taken to imply that this paradigm of democracy is no different from a one-party polity. Based on this reasoning, so the argument goes, the political personalities that have taken the one-party polity as their preferred mode of political governance have often claimed that it has ancestry in Africa's consensual democracy (Nyerere 1961; Nkrumah 1973). For instance, Nyerere (1961) thinks that his idea of one-party polity finds inspiration in Africa's indigenous political system, that is, consensual democracy. Some supposedly shared attributes between these two paradigms of democracy have been contrived. In order to show that there are strong connections between the consensual dispensation and the one-party polity, it has often been argued that "in a one-party system there is no conflict of parties. No party loses because *the* party wins" (Wiredu 1997, 308; emphasis in original). Wiredu (1997, 308) doubts such connections between a consensual polity and a one-party polity, and in fact argues that

> in the traditional set-up, no party lost because all the parties were natural partners in power or, more strictly, because there were no parties.[8] In the one-party situation, the reason why no party loses is because murdered parties do not compete.

This appears to be plausible because in a consensual dispensation there are "parties" that participate in decision-making, while in a one-party polity, other parties that would have been interested in wrestling power from the "one-party" are prevented from doing so. As such, it might not be viable to argue that both the non-party polity and the one-party polity share the absence of "parties". Below, I defend Wiredu's (1997) consensual democracy from the averments of his critics that it provides the basis for the emergence of a one-party polity in Africa.

A defence of Wiredu's consensual polity

In this section, I defend Wiredu's (1997) consensual democracy from the claims of detractors that his idea of consensual democracy provides the ground for the emergence of a one-party polity. This position is prominently defended by Michael Onyebuchi Eze (2008), Carlos Jacques (2012) and Bernard Matolino (2013; 2016). The conclusion that could be drawn from this contention is that a total disconnect between the two is largely indefensible. I argue that though such a position is to some degree plausible, there is a sense in which the one-party polity is confused with Wiredu's consensual polity in construing the former as having ancestry in the latter. In this connection, I first analyse the view that Wiredu's (1997) consensual democracy resembles a one-party polity. My focus is to determine the character of this position. Second, I argue that Wiredu's (1997) attempts to show that the "one-party persuaders" are wrong in seeking to situate the ancestry of one-party polity in African consensual polity does not sufficiently help his case because he does not seem to address the reasonability of such an inference beyond asserting that these polities are ontologically distinct entities and do not share any recognisable commonalities. As I see it, even if it were to be established that the consensual polity and the one-party polity share significant commonalities, that could not be sufficient grounds to conclude that the one-party polity has its ancestry in African consensual polity.

One question that could be raised with respect to attempts to return to consensual democracy as the basis upon which African countries ought to construct their governance paradigms pertains to its character in promoting authentic freedoms and rights enshrined in a democracy qua democracy and absent in a one-party polity. In other words, fears that it might not be any different from the loathed one-party polity could be raised. For instance, one may not completely rule out the possibility of the presence of demagogues in a consensus-seeking political arrangement that may employ their demagoguery to dominate debate and thereby muzzle the voices of other participants in the debate. This is also true of countries in Africa where consensual democracy is considered the preferred type of democracy. In articulating the ideals of consensual democracy, Wiredu (2007) might need to consider how the presence of these characters may affect the process of genuine consensus-seeking since the existence of some demagogues in any society can hardly be doubted. However,

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8   The term "party" here is used to refer to political parties in a majoritarian democracy.

there might be a need to control their influence so that the outcome of deliberation is significantly consensual and embracing.

Wiredu (2007) tries to convince those who may doubt the credibility of a consensual polity to create a truly democratic dispensation that it indeed embodies a democratic ethos and is an attractive option for African countries. In this connection, Wiredu (1997) denies that the consensual polity and the one-party polity share some significant commonalities that would then lead one to the conclusion that the latter emerges from the former or are essentially similar in their character, as thinkers such as Carlos Jacques[9] (2012) would like to imply. The consensual dispensation may not have a multi-party system in the sense in which political "parties" are conceived of in a multi-party majoritarian democracy, so the argument goes, but it essentially has "parties" in a special sense. These "parties" are understood as groupings intent on contributing to the decision-making processes of government. As Wiredu (1997, 309) argues, "these parties provided the centres of independent thought presupposed by the very idea of meaningful dialogue in the process of political decision-making – those conditions of rational interaction that the one-party system was so efficient in destroying".

If it is to be granted that the "parties" in a consensual dispensation are engaged in robust dialogue, then it becomes contestable that such dialogues always lead to the attainment of consensual positions. In this light, one might doubt the genuineness of the "independent thought" of such deliberations given that its expected outcome is decidedly the attainment of the "common good". Yet, it appears reasonable to expect a plethora of diverse outcomes where "independent thought" of "parties" is practised. In this connection, it seems unexpected that in the presence of "independent thought", the dialogue of "parties" manages to avoid degenerating into political squabbles. Perhaps, the thinking that deliberations in a consensual democracy type are characterised by "independent thought", yet destined for the attainment of the "common good", could lead to the suspicions that the consensual polity is no different from a one-party polity.

However, Wiredu (1997) insists that the "independent thought" that "parties" wield actually is a precondition to successful deliberations in a consensual democracy. In fact, as Wiredu (1997) argues, the presence of "independent thought" among "parties" in a consensual polity makes it significantly different from one-party polity: a paradigm that actually loathes it and work towards decimating it. However, Wiredu's (1997) attempts to show that the consensual polity (that he defends) and the one-party polity do not share significant attributes in common have been considered as largely unconvincing because there appear to be genuine reasons to think that the two have strong connections (Jacques 2012). In fact, as Jacques (2012) argues, the idea of unity in the pre-colonial African community that ought to inspire the idea of consensual democracy in the present African state is hard to accept without equally accepting the denial of human difference.

Similarly, Eze (2008, 391) thinks that "consensus neither accommodates autonomy nor alterity, but suppresses these core values of human identity". However, a sympathetic reading of Wiredu (1997) may not totally confirm such suspicions. Even though Wiredu's (1997) idea of consensual polity may be conceived as aiding the cause of a one-party polity, it is not his intention to do so. His intention is to fashion a consensual dispensation that fares better than the multi-party majoritarian democracy. In fact, Wiredu (1997) actually accepts that in the "traditional" African community, diversity of opinion and conflicts were common (Ani 2014). This on its own shows that Wiredu's (1997) consensual dispensation may not be expressly conceived as negating the values of autonomy and alterity.

Besides Eze (2008) and Jacques (2012), Matolino (2013; 2016) has also shown that there is a strong possible link between Wiredu's consensual polity and one-party polity that I consider to be important for my purposes here. Matolino (2013) has been chosen for special focus because of his

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9   Jacques (2012) thinks that both a consensual polity and a one-party polity share similar attributes such as a tendency to tyranny and an aversion to multi-party democracy. Yet, Helen Lauer (2012a) rejects such interpretations by electing to argue that the two could not be conceived as advocating the same cause. On the contrary, Lauer (2011) holds that Wiredu's consensual democracy is non-tyrannical and pursues the authentic democratic path. As such, Lauer (2011) complements Wiredu's concerted efforts to repel the suspicions that consensual democracy and the one-party polity are fundamentally similar. Though the position held by Lauer (2012a) is somehow plausible, Jacques' (2012) claims also seem to have some merits.

substantive analysis of Wiredu's use of the term "parties". For Matolino (2013), though Wiredu is not an advocate of a one-party state per se, his description of a consensual polity points in that direction.

The main line of defence for Matolino's (2013) thesis that there is not much of a difference between Wiredu's consensual polity and a one-party polity resides in the assumed, convoluted use of the term "party" or "parties" by Wiredu (Matolino 2013). Upon closer analysis, Wiredu's (1997) use of the term "parties" in reference to a non-party polity and a one-party polity seems to succeed in justifying discernible ontological differences between them. As Wiredu (2007, 164) argues, the term "party" can be used in three senses, to refer to: (1) an individual or group of individuals coalescing on "a given issue or project"; (2) being a participant in decision-making; and (3) a group of people "basically of one mind, organized with the aim of winning governmental power". To conform to Wiredu's (2007) convention, numerical subscripts are used to designate the three senses in which he uses the term "party".

As Matolino argues (2013), a critical reading of Wiredu would show that $party_1$ and $party_3$ are actual political parties that, in a significant sense, do not seem to be different from each other. If Matolino's (2013) argument were to be taken seriously, then Wiredu's (2007) defence of the substantial difference between his consensual polity and a one-party polity would become contestable. This is despite the fact that Wiredu (2007) conceives of them as significantly different from each other in terms of their purpose and agenda. In this connection, $party_1$ and $party_3$ are considered fundamentally different from each other (Wiredu 2007). It appears $party_{1,2}$ are the embodiments of the consensual polity that Wiredu finds attractive, while $party_3$ denotes the nature of political parties in a multi-party majoritarian democracy that aim at attaining political power for their self-serving ends, a paradigm of democracy that he detests.

Yet, Matolino (2013) does not see where the supposed difference between $party_1$ and $party_3$ really resides. For Matolino (2013, 146),

> Wiredu's characterisation of $party_1$ as an association of citizens who seek to pursue certain political ideologies legitimises, if it chooses to, $party_1$'s pursuit of power. For indeed such a pursuit is not strictly forbidden on Wiredu's description of the essence of the constitution of $party_1$. A charitable reading of Wiredu will suggest that he seeks to maintain all political activity and association as long as it does not transfer itself to sectional appropriation of power to the exclusion of other $parties_1$.

Based on this rendering, the claim that $party_1$ is not focused on pursuit of power, while $party_3$ is, would fall away because both paradigms do have in some measure the capacity to pursue power (Matolino 2013). This interpretation of Wiredu's idea of $party_1$ appears contestable because $parties_1$ are not power-seekers as Matolino (2013) seems to allege. In fact, Wiredu (1997) credits $party_1$ for promoting "independent thought" that is necessary for "meaningful dialogue". However, Matolino (2013, 147) argues that "it is quite inconceivable to imagine a $party_1$ organising itself on the strong belief that seeking consensus is its ultimate quest in its political programme and existence". This could serve to show that the distinction between $party_1$ and $party_3$ is largely illusory. This illusory distinction between $party_1$ and $party_3$ might have much to do with how Matolino (2013) interprets Wiredu's (2007) understanding of $party_1$ and $party_3$, and not how Wiredu (2007) defined them.

While Wiredu (2007, 164) defines parties to $party_1$ as "an individual or group of individuals with an interest or concern for a given issue or project", Matolino (2013, 146) interprets the same differently when he states that "Wiredu's characterisation of $party_1$ as an association of citizens who seek to pursue certain political ideologies legitimises, if it chooses to, $party_1$'s pursuit of power". The problem with this interpretation is that it might render a meaning that is significantly different from the one that Wiredu (2007) intends the term "party" to mean. This then gives credence to the notion that the parties as understood by Wiredu are just power seekers intent on sectional appropriation of power, just like political parties in majoritarian democracy.

I do not think that $parties_1$ as Wiredu (2007) understands them have ideologies as implied in Matolino's (2013) interpretation because once it is accepted that they are intent on seeking "certain political ideologies", it becomes reasonable to consider $party_1$ and $party_3$ as both motivated by

pursuit of power and their distinction illusory. This is not how Wiredu (2007) deploys the term "party$_1$". In fact, the use of the emotive term "ideology" in describing the import of party$_1$ is problematic, especially given how it is often understood as a form of consciousness that is intent on serving the interests of the dominant classes in society (Apple 2004). Yet, the nature of party$_1$ is not to seek the domination or proscription of other parties, but to participate in deliberations leading to consensual decisions.

As Wiredu (2007, 165) argues, "anyone who tries to take liberties with the citizen's right to form or belong to a party$_1$ of his choice is trifling with one of the most fundamental of human rights, namely the right of free expression, association being a form of expression". In such a scenario, one may not rule out the possibility of party$_1$ digressing from its "expected function" in order to pursue sectional interests to the detriment of other parties$_1$. Parties that subsist in party$_1$ may thus have serious differences in terms of preferred agendas and decision-making options. However, Wiredu argues the moment of compromise is necessary for them to attain consensual positions.

It might be necessary to establish whether party$_2$ could be considered a conceptually distinct entity from party$_1$. I agree with Matolino (2013) that it is not proper to take party$_2$ as a party in the sense in which party$_1$ and party$_3$ are. Based on this reasoning, it seems to make sense to consider the functions of party$_2$ as a decisional moment or a moment of participation of parties$_1$ in the decision-making processes and not as conceptually and practically distinct from them. In this light, it appears plausible to consider party$_1$ as a more rudimentary party than party$_2$, even as both are engaged in the consensual process, devoid of the desire for political power.

I now return to Wiredu's (1997) denial of the strong possible connections between consensual democracy and a one-party state. Wiredu (2007, 166) claims that a combination of party$_1$ and party$_3$ could give rise to what he calls a "de facto one-party state". As Wiredu (2007, 166) explains, "a de facto one-party$_{1,3}$ situation would exist if one party$_1$ is allowed to function and flourish, while all others are proscribed on (inevitably) false accusations of subversive actions or intentions". Because one party$_1$ decides to separate itself from other parties$_1$ and avoid the moment of participation in the decision-making process subsisting in party$_2$ in its quest to attain sole political power for its own political ends such a party$_1$ would then mutate into party$_{1,3}$. Yet, as Matolino (2013, 148) argues, party$_{1,3}$ that Wiredu conceives as representing a one-party state seems to be an incoherent idea since "the nature of party$_1$ is such that it does not tend to seek the destruction of other instances of party$_1$, either deliberately or not". I can add that it also does not intend to downplay the importance of the decisional moment in a consensual polity.

However, Matolino's (2013) critique of Wiredu's idea of a one-party polity represented by party$_{1,3}$ could have benefitted from a consideration of Wiredu's (2007, 166) explanation that places the construction of "a de facto one-party$_{1,3}$ state" on some "ambitious and ingenious power seekers" who proceed under the guise of forming a non-party$_3$ polity. As Wiredu (2007, 166) argues,

> …in fact, the likeliest source of trouble might be ambitious and ingenious power seekers who might scheme to create a de facto one-party$_{1,3}$ state (note the double subscripts) under the disguise of a no-party$_3$ rhetoric.

Wiredu (2007) is clear that the purpose of parties$_1$ is to solve problems that affect society with no intention to dominate one another. This is different from parties in party$_3$ that seek to capture political power and attempt to dominate other parties.

However, it is not very clear how the "ambitious and ingenious power seekers" digress from being party$_2$ to deliberations leading to consensual decisions to form a de facto one-party state, and whether such an occurrence is a realistic possibility in the light of Wiredu's (2007) idea of party$_1$ as Matolino (2013) aptly argues. Perhaps Wiredu (2007) could have helped his case more by spelling out how a party to party$_1$ succeeds in suppressing other parties to party$_1$ such that it claims sole legitimacy as the governing party at the expense of other parties$_1$. Use of the term "allowed" in explaining how a de facto one-party state emerges might be problematic, especially when one considers that its flourishing is attained through the proscription of other parties$_1$.

In this connection, if Wiredu's (2007) claim that one party$_1$ can flourish and silence other parties$_1$, thereby rendering being party$_2$ to the decision-making process non-existent since (one party$_1$ is in

existence in the true sense) and thus ascend to governmental power, it would be difficult to deny that the emergence of a one-party polity is traceable to $party_1$ just as the consensual polity. In a way, the conduct of parties to $party_1$ can produce either a consensual dispensation or a one-party polity. From the reading of Wiredu's (2007) argument, the outcome would be determined by the behaviour of some parties in $party_1$. If parties in $party_1$ were to behave as they are expected to and submit themselves to being $party_2$ to the decision-making moment, then a consensual polity would come into being.

Based on Wiredu's (2007) explanation of how a party of $party_1$ mutates into a one-party polity, one may be tempted to think that a one-party polity has its ancestry in consensual polity. This might be an outcome of misreading of Wiredu's idea of a consensual polity. Parties to $party_1$ on their own do not represent a moment of consensus without being $party_2$ to deliberations leading to decisional consensus. Consensus is attained if $parties_1$ become participants in decision-making or $party_2$ to decision-making. The sense in which I understand the "ancestry" of a one-party polity here is different from the way one-party defenders would want to regard it as emerging from Africa's consensual polity. Those who want to locate the African ancestry of a one-party polity often refer to the commonalities that subsist between the two models of governance.

Based on Wiredu's (2007) idea of consensual democracy, it appears reasonable to accept that both the non-party polity and the one-party polity somehow emerge from $party_1$ if one were to follow seriously his account of how a non-party polity and a $party_{1,3}$ (one-party polity) emerge from $party_1$. Both the non-party polity and the one-party polity emerge from $parties_1$. As I see it, the crucial distinguishing factor between them is the behaviours and dispositions of these $parties_1$. If the parties are willing to be $party_2$ to deliberations, then the outcome will be decisional consensus that is constitutive of a consensual polity. However, when one $party_1$ proscribes other parties such that it seeks to further its existence, while curtailing those of others, then a de facto one-party polity emerges.

I think that a more plausible basis for denying the ancestry of the one-party polity in the African consensual polity espoused by Wiredu (2007) would be to argue that parties to $party_1$ do not represent a point of consensus until they are $party_2$ to deliberations that eventually lead to decisional consensus. If this were an acceptable reading of Wiredu's thesis, it would appear unproblematic to claim that both the consensual polity and the one-party polity have a common ancestry in the sense of both originating from $party_1$. However, $party_1$ seems to fall short of depicting the idea of consensus that Wiredu defends (2007). It would be contestable to claim that the one-party polity originates from the African consensual polity when $party_1$ is wrongly considered as representing the moment of consensus. It also does not seem to be reasonable to expect the one-party polity to emerge from a scenario where $parties_1$ are $party_2$ to decision-making because it is alien to this mode of governance for one $party_1$ to proscribe other $parties_1$ in order for it to become de facto $party_{1,3}$.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that though Wiredu's consensual democracy may share some similarities with a one-party polity, it does not necessarily follow that it has inspired the emergence of one-party polities in Africa. In fact, it would appear as if both the non-party polity and the one-party polity have a common ancestry in $party_1$. However, $party_1$ may not be legitimately taken as representing a consensual moment or as embodying consensual democracy. In this light, it would appear contentious to claim that a one-party polity has ancestry in African consensual democracy especially if one were to seriously consider Wiredu's understanding of $party_1$, $party_2$ and $party_3$. In fact, it appears reasonable to claim that both the non-party polity and the one-party polity emerge from the $party_1$.

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