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Succession of the Charismatic Leader: The Gordian Knot of African Politics

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM OF RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT in Africa is one that has been familiar to sociologists since Max Weber: the succession of the charismatic leader. Change, whether violent (assassination, coup d'état, or civil war) or peaceful (the orderly transition of power, liberalization, democratization), has been guided by underlying forces whose concrete, often dramatic manifestations conceal their essential nature and real significance. How is power transferred in a given society? How is the succession to leadership determined (in practice as well as theory)? In the new African nations, which have experienced many political crises in the course of their development, there seems to be no generally accepted answer to these questions. Or at any rate, there seems to be no understanding of the fact that agreement as to how power should be transferred is the *sine qua non* of political stability and of society's peaceful development. Change, therefore, has often been chaotic and haphazard, and attempts at rational organization of the state have been erratic at best, usually coming in the wake of military coups or other crises of the sort that are all too familiar in most African countries. Indeed, it is because difficulties have been encountered in trying to organize the state rationally, and to establish a consensus concerning the transfer of power, that coups have become endemic, and that experiments with democracy and civilian rule have so often proved disappointing. If the winds of democracy are blowing over Africa today, one reason may be that democracy provides a rational solution to the problem of succession. Liberalization of the regime in a sense forces a country to establish a rational system for transferring power. Thus, by beginning the liberalization process, the aging charismatic leader sets the stage for his own succession. From Bourguiba in Tunisia to Senghor in Senegal and Houphouet-Boigny in the Ivory Coast, democratization in one form or another has lately been laying the groundwork for new leadership by changing the balance of power among the various opposing political forces, forces that can no longer be controlled by what Weber calls the "routinization of charisma." Thus it is no exaggeration to say that the problem of succession is one that all African states must confront.

What solutions to this problem have been proposed? This is the question that I shall try to answer in this essay. I also want to look at the nature of power itself. Indeed, to speak of a "mode of succession" is really to speak of a "mode of legitimation of power," for any mode of succession necessarily corresponds to some mode of legitimation. In other words, no transfer of power is likely to

succeed unless it is sanctioned by the prevailing form of authority. Thus the kinds of political crisis and conflict that we have been talking about until now may be described as "crises of legitimacy," to borrow Habermas's phrase. In short, the problem of finding successors for charismatic leaders in Africa is one aspect of a general crisis of political legitimacy that different countries have tried to resolve in different ways.

The point of the present essay, then, is to examine the foundations of political authority in Africa in the light of Max Weber's analysis of charismatic leadership. We shall be looking at the forms that charismatic power has taken in Africa, how they came into being, and how they operate. In short, we shall be studying the history of charismatic power in Africa and its influence on African political development in general. We shall also be looking at the problems that charismatic leadership poses for political development in Africa, and in particular, at the one central problem that overshadows all the rest, namely, the problem of continuity, or how to find a successor for a charismatic leader. Concrete examples will be given to illustrate the points being made, examples drawn from the experience of various African nations. Since an exhaustive analysis is impossible within the confines of an essay, I shall focus on typical cases that exemplify my general points.

Beyond irrational political behavior and other perverse consequences of charismatic authority, African societies must confront a more general problem: namely, how to organize their governments. In my view, without a rational organization of the state, no political development is possible. Here we touch not only on questions of sociological method and scientific outlook, but also, if I may say so, on matters of political faith. Let me make my own position clear: for better or for worse, every society must agree on a principle of political legitimacy. The rationalization of the state is a crucial prerequisite of all social development. It is in this connection that Weber's ideas about charisma and the rationalization of power turn out to be most relevant to the analysis of political systems in the developing countries. Because of the profound cultural changes that these countries are being forced to undergo in the course of development, it is more likely than not that they will give rise to charismatic leadership of one sort or another. Before turning to a detailed examination of the situation in Africa, therefore, I should like first to relate the topic of the present essay to Weber's general theory of charismatic authority.[1]

The Nature of Power in Africa and Weber's Theory of Charisma

For methodological reasons, it is convenient to digress a moment to explain the concepts we will be using and a little about the general theory they are part of. I start from Weber's analysis of "types of legitimacy," because the notion of charisma can really be understood only in relation to the two other types of authority that Weber defines. It will soon become apparent that all the African regimes that have come into being since 1960 have been based on authority of the charismatic type.

According to Weber, all power is based on legitimate authority. By "legitimate authority," he means an authority that invokes generally recognized principles to justify its exercise of power. There are three ways in which an

authority may obtain legitimacy, or recognition of its right to govern. More precisely, Weber defines three pure forms of legitimate authority, three "ideal types" that exist nowhere in their pure state. By combining these three ideal types in various proportions, however, we can gain a clearer understanding of actual political regimes. The three ideal types defined by Weber are traditional authority, legal-rational authority, and charismatic authority.

Traditional authority is recognized as legitimate by virtue of tradition, custom, and veneration of previous generations. Typically, it is found in monarchical societies, ancient kingdoms, and traditional African tribes. Traditional authority depends in one sense on the force of habit. It is rooted in an ancestral past. The current leaders thus become the supreme guardians of tradition, the defenders of the age-old institutions that they control. Under this type of authority, laws and customs handed down from earlier generations are used to justify the current political structure. Thus the transmission of authority is characteristically hereditary in this type of regime. Status is normally inherited and is not due solely to an individual's personal merit.

Legal-rational authority derives from a coherent system of rules that are commonly submitted to the entire population for acceptance or rejection. Typical examples of such rules are the constitutions and legal systems of modern states. Modern administrative and bureaucratic structures are also typical of this form of authority. Institutions, laws, and constitutional order are the only source of legitimacy in a legal-rational system. The law is sovereign, not individuals or particular groups of individuals. The institutions created by constitutional laws take precedence over the individuals and groups who happen to hold power at any given moment. Those in authority derive their right to govern from the provisions of the constitution and laws currently in effect. The rules governing succession or alternation of power are also defined by the constitution. Modern democratic states are the most striking example of this kind of authority: in democratic systems, universal suffrage settles the question of how power is to be transferred.

Finally, charismatic authority, the focus of this essay, is based on an almost religious respect for, or faith in, a leader to whom exceptional qualities are attributed. These qualities may be thought to be of divine origin, as in the case of a religious prophet, or they may simply manifest extraordinary personal talents. According to Weber, this type of authority is characterized by "absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership. This is 'charismatic' domination, as exercised by the prophet or—in the field of politics—by the elected war lord, the plebiscitarian ruler, the great demagogue, or the political party leader."[2] It is the "personal grace"—the charisma—of the leader that is the prime mover of the political system. The charismatic leader is obeyed because of his charm, his prestige, his influence, his personal magnetism and power to sway crowds. Pomp and ceremony, mob passion, ritual, the cult of personality, deification and personalization of power—in short, all the symbolic and emotional components of politics—assume greater importance in this kind of regime than rational decision-making. As Weber says, "Men do not obey [the charismatic leader] by virtue of tradition or statute but because they believe in him."[3] This explains why all charismatic power is in essence revolutionary: breaking with

custom, respecting no law, it rises against the established order and stands as the creator of a new order. Accordingly, charismatic rule is generally linked to a social movement that establishes a new order. A revolution led by a charismatic figure is one of the most effective ways of overthrowing regimes based on traditional or legal authority. But since charismatic power depends on the exceptional qualities of an individual, sooner or later its legitimacy will be called into question, most notably when it comes time to find a successor for the charismatic figure. Thus the great question of charismatic authority is succession. In effect, when the authority of a leader extends beyond the limits laid down by custom and law, the crucial question is how to make sure that authority will endure when the individual in whom extraordinary powers are vested is no longer on the scene.

In Weber's view, charismatic power is in essence ephemeral and transitory. It sets the stage either for a traditional form of authority, by establishing a new tradition, or for a legal-rational form of authority, by institutionalizing procedures for the transfer of power. Before either of these possibilities is realized, however, the charismatic leader or his successors may try to capitalize on the leader's legendary prestige in order to "routinize" his charisma, to use Weber's now celebrated term. Weber goes into considerable detail about the ways in which charisma may be routinized. Space does not allow us to recapitulate his account here in full detail. Let me say simply that the end result of routinization is the glorification of the period during which the new regime was founded. Either the aging charismatic leader himself or his successor (who benefits from the prestige accruing to his illustrious predecessor) attempts to prolong the period of charismatic rule by staging festivals, establishing public holidays, and creating new political rituals (involving outdoor speeches, meetings, ceremonial state visits, international conferences, and so forth, with a judicious admixture of ethnic color, stirring ideology, and appeals to ancestral roots). In Africa it is common for the leader to emphasize the symbolic, emotional, and utopian, rather than the rational, institutional, and practical, aspects of politics. Thus the consequences of the routinization of charisma, in the forms it has generally taken in Africa, have been unfortunate: these include economic and political inefficiency, the development of one-party rule, excessive personalization of power, authoritarianism, slowing of political development, coups d'état, and military dictatorships. In African politics, the coup d'état has come to be seen as an almost normal way of transferring power from a charismatic leader to others.

Weber's account of the development and routinization of charisma seems to fit African political realities fairly well. Before turning to the main topic of this essay, the succession of the charismatic leader, it will therefore be useful to take a brief look at what Weber has to say on these topics.[4]

All of the recently decolonized African nations have had to deal with problems created by charismatic power. Conditions favorable to the development of charismatic leadership were created in Africa first by colonization itself and later by the problems that developed not only after independence, but even more during the period of struggles that led to decolonization. The hope of a savior or a hero capable of putting an end to colonial domination, and the need for a great teacher to restore a shattered cultural identity and establish a new

political order, created a situation that fairly demanded the emergence of a charismatic leader. Pushing the point somewhat, we might even say that the very anticipation of a savior, the expectation of a new political order, made the society itself charismatic, even before the advent of the charismatic personality. The masses were "starved for charisma," to use Erik Erikson's expression.[5] Thus the historic figure who leads the anticolonial forces and succeeds in winning his country's independence becomes the leader of a triumphant party and a national hero, the father of his country. He becomes the symbol of the long-awaited new order, and whether he likes it or not, the adulation of the masses makes the providential hero into a charismatic leader.

To recapitulate, then, the emergence of historic leaders in the fight for independence, the problems of modernization and economic development that all new nations must face, and the general mobilization of the populace in the face of these problems all contribute to the development of charismatic forms of power. Charismatic governments are, as we mentioned earlier, typically associated with social movements that create a new social order. Weber in fact emphasizes the connection between the emergence of charismatic leadership and situations involving a transition from a traditional to a modern type of society, situations in which the foundations of the traditional order are for one reason or another shaken. In short, charismatic governments are quite likely to emerge in societies that, like those of Africa, are undergoing profound cultural transformation.

Once a charismatic government is established, however, there are urgent tasks to be accomplished: power must be consolidated, political control established, governmental institutions created, and an administrative network extended to cover the full extent of the national territory. In trying to carry out these tasks, the new government immediately comes up against all of the problems associated with charismatic regimes, problems that in Africa are all the more acute owing to the lack of a legal tradition and to the reemergence of older forms of authority in the wake of decolonization. There is no doubt that in the postindependence period, political development throughout Africa has been hampered by problems inherent in charismatic forms of government. Indeed, the reemergence of older forms of legitimacy, coinciding with the period of consolidation of the newly established regimes, has created a general crisis of legitimacy on the continent.

This crisis of legitimacy sets the stage for a kind of political drama that is quite familiar in Africa. What we commonly see in this phase of legitimation and consolidation of new regimes is conflict between the different principles of legitimacy. In African nations today we find all three principles at work, and none outweighs the others sufficiently to insure the permanence of the system. The sources of instability inherent in each type of legitimacy reinforce one another, with the result that the political system is always potentially in crisis. The way in which power is transferred is of course a crucial feature of the general crisis situation. Political conflict in general revolves around the crisis of legitimacy, and the new nations must therefore find ways to resolve this crisis. The situation in Africa is one in which traditional authority has crumbled and yet no new authority (whether institutional or charismatic) is sufficiently

established to take its place. This leads to social disintegration and to a breakdown of the political order, both old and new, with the result that the developing countries are beset with constant political conflict.

Indeed, I want to argue that, whenever a society experiences a conflict between different principles of legitimacy, it enters upon a long period of crisis marked by incessant struggle over the fundamental nature of the political system, struggle that brings social unrest in its wake. Society itself becomes "sick," or as Emile Durkheim would say, "anomic." As long as African societies fail to agree on a principle for the legitimation of power, they will continue to be subject to this kind of conflict and to permanent political instability in the form of civil war, subversion, conspiracy, governmental crisis, or coups d'état. Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, in the absence of any rules governing the transfer of power from a charismatic leader to his successors, the coup d'état has become almost an accepted way of making the transition. Before turning to a discussion of the specific ways in which this transition has been accomplished in Africa, it is worth pausing a moment to consider the theoretical connection between the crisis of legitimacy and the problem of succession in a charismatic regime.

When a political system must confront a crisis of succession, the entire population becomes subject to a sort of mass hysteria, particularly in charismatic regimes, where the people's only sense of political security and stability comes from their enthusiastic support for the charismatic leader. This hysteria, which grips masses and political leaders alike, is but the outward expression of the crisis of political legitimacy that is the inevitable consequence of the departure of a charismatic leader. All thought turns to the question of how best to assure the continuation of power once the leader is gone. Even though laws may exist that in theory spell out the way in which power is to be transferred, the mere existence of an appropriate body of law is not enough to ensure that its provisions will be accepted by the leader's "followers," whose relationship to him is more emotional than rational or legalistic. Where a long-standing legal-rational tradition exists, as in Western Europe, for example, the emergence of a charismatic leader seems purely circumstantial. There, charismatic authority will sooner or later give way to a traditional or institutional regime based on the existing legal tradition. But in newly established countries, like those of Africa, that lack any legal tradition of their own, the problem of succession is the Gordian knot of politics.

With the leader gone and everyone in the grip of political hysteria, the leader's aides and other political figures then try to discover or, by manipulating the masses, to fabricate a replacement, a new bearer of charisma, someone with characteristics similar to those of the departed leader. Sometimes the charismatic leader himself, while he is still in power, designates his own successor. The nomination of a prime minister or vice-president may alleviate the hysteria, but the central problem remains, for charisma cannot be taught or improvised. Alternatively, the leader may appoint himself president for life or crown himself emperor in an effort to establish a tradition in terms of which the hereditary transmission of his charisma can be justified. Or the masses may try to predict who the eventual successor will be by interpreting the ruler's statements, predilections, and desires, or by taking the temperature, so to

speak, of the ruling class, whose members often compete for the succession in an atmosphere of general discord, not to say animosity and fierce rivalry. At the grassroots, these conflicts within the ruling class may translate into nothing more complicated than traditional tribal rivalries: since the ruler is a member of tribe A, someone is bound to argue that his successor must come from tribe B, C, or D. This kind of rotating leadership is familiar to ethnologists who have studied societies divided along generational lines. Dahomey (present-day Benin) experimented with a system in which co-presidents drawn from each of the country's three major ethnic groups were supposed to govern in turn, but the experiment proved unsuccessful.

Because of the difficulty of transferring power peacefully in charismatic regimes, recent years have seen a growing number of military coups in African states ruled by charismatic figures. Consequently, I should like to turn now to a discussion of present-day conditions in Africa, applying Weber's theoretical ideas to actual situations.

The Succession of Charismatic Leaders in Africa: A Historical Overview

We now shift the ground of our discussion, moving from general sociological theory to empirical political science. It is therefore important to bear in mind that Weber's ideal types of authority are never found in the pure state. In most political systems we find all three types, mixed in varying proportions. In discussing any real polity, we must take account of both what kind of political system the founders intended to create and what form of authority actually predominates. In particular, the routinization of charisma does not always go according to the charismatic leader's plan. What actually takes place is a contest involving charismatic, institutional, and traditional forces, each seeking supremacy over the others. If the political system is to achieve stability, the contest must sooner or later result in the victory of either a traditional or a legal-rational structure. The charismatic element will not totally disappear, however, at least not in the current state of African politics. Rather, it will be absorbed into the other elements and thus outlive the original authority figure. In this power struggle, the political actors will try various strategies to achieve one of two possible goals: either they will seek to establish the charismatic system on a permanent footing, or they will try to change it to establish either a traditional system or a more legal-rational form of government. No matter what mode of succession is chosen, the aim is always to resolve what we have been calling the crisis of legitimacy.

We are now ready to begin discussing concrete cases. But since there have been so many different kinds of attempts to resolve the problem of succession in Africa, for ease of understanding I will group the cases into three broad categories.

First of all, there have been efforts to perpetuate charismatic rule, with or without the historical leader's participation. These may be subsumed under the head of routinization of charisma. Second, there have been attempts to use violence to put an end to charismatic rule, usually in order to establish a legal-rational system. Here I am thinking of the efforts that have been made in some African states to normalize or democratize military dictatorships established

subsequent to a coup d'état. Finally, in certain other states, the leader himself has initiated democratization by decreeing systematic rules for the transfer of power, thus paving the way for his own succession. Summarizing, then, we have the following three categories:

1. Routinization of charisma
2. Violent seizure of power, followed by transformation of political system
3. Democratization initiated by the charismatic leader himself

Of course this typology, though useful for analytical purposes, does not do justice to the complexity of real political situations. There is in fact some overlap: a coup d'état may lead not only to democratization, but also to routinization of charisma; a charismatic leader may justify his power in traditional ways instead of moving toward more rational institutions and greater democracy; and finally, a crisis in an institutionalized form of government may be resolved by turning to a charismatic leader. Since an exhaustive treatment is beyond the scope of this essay, I repeat that only a few more or less typical cases will be considered here.

ROUTINIZATION OF CHARISMA

Quite dissimilar situations are grouped together under this head. To begin with, the charismatic leader himself may seek to perpetuate his reign. Or he and his aides, or both, may look for another charismatic personality. Or again, a general may be thrust into power in the wake of a coup d'état and be transformed by a society starved for charisma into a new charismatic head of state. The modality of change is immaterial; the important point is that in each case the result is routinization of charisma.

To look first at some extreme examples: a charismatic leader may appoint himself "president for life" or crown himself "emperor." This may be done in stages. For example, Macias Nguema, the former president of Equatorial Guinea, who wielded a personalized and deified form of power that can only be regarded as charismatic, appointed himself "president for life, major general of the army, chief educator of the nation, supreme scientist, master of traditional culture, and chairman of the *Parti Unique National des Travailleurs* [the One National Workers' Party], as well as the only miracle that Equatorial Guinea ever produced." Outlawing the Christian religion, he replaced it with his own personality cult: all prayers were required to begin with the words, "In the name of Father Macias, our savior and redeemer." Doubtless, this is an extreme example, and the dictatorship and tyranny that almost inevitably result from such excesses ultimately set the stage for a coup d'état, such as the one that toppled Macias and so many others like him. Still, the important point to be made here is that the institution of a life presidency has frequently been used in Africa as a way of routinizing charisma. And if Macias Nguema declared himself president for life in violation of the Guinean constitution, another dictator, General Bokassa, had the support of his party when he did the same thing in 1972. After winning power in the Central African Republic in 1965, Bokassa, then a colonel, proclaimed himself first general and then field marshal

of his army. He then had his appointment as president for life approved by the members of the only party in the country, the MESSAN, in 1972. Finally, in December 1977 a special party congress declared him emperor of the Central African Republic. A new constitution inaugurated a constitutional monarchy, with the intention of making the succession hereditary. Of course, as everyone knows, this attempt to turn the Central African Republic into a traditional empire proved unsuccessful. Like Macias Nguema and Idi Amin Dada, who were also preparing to elevate themselves to the status of emperor, Bokassa was turned out by a military coup.[6]

If the routinization of charisma led to a return to a traditional type of regime in Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, and Uganda, events took a different turn in Tunisia. There, Habib Bourguiba became president for life and succeeded in institutionalizing his charismatic authority. The "commander in chief and father of the Tunisian nation," Bourguiba gained independence for his country in 1956. Article 40 of the Tunisian constitution states clearly that "no person shall be elected President of the Republic for more than three consecutive terms." But Bourguiba, after having been elected three times, in 1959, 1964, and 1969, ran for office a fourth time and was once again elected. He resorted to the simple expedient of having the constitution amended by referendum to provide for his own election as president for life.

The case of Tunisia invites reflection, not so much on questions of power politics or legal niceties, but rather on the crucial role of elections in the routinization of charisma in Africa. Given the political realities prevailing in Africa today, a head of state need not declare himself president for life or stage an election to sanction his life tenure. It is common for the incumbent to garner 99.99 percent of the votes cast in many elections, so that a sitting president becomes in effect president for life, whether or not he officially assumes the title. Barring resignation or a military takeover, he is assured of a life term in office. Yet elections also have a cathartic function. They enable the head of state to mobilize his people and to reestablish contact with the masses. And they renew and reaffirm the legitimacy of the historic leader of the nation. Furthermore, since African states are generally ruled by one-party regimes, it is hardly to be expected that elections will sweep a rival party into power as in a pluralist democracy. Rather, they serve a ritual function, reinforcing the power of the charismatic leader. Pluralism is out of the question in any truly charismatic society, for the opposition would be doomed in advance to lose every election. Each electoral contest provides the leader's party with an opportunity to strengthen its hand. Since all good fortune is thought to flow from the divine grace (charisma) of the true historic leader, members of the opposition are likely to be viewed as traitors and enemies of the state.

Another strategy for perpetuating and reinforcing charismatic power is the threat of resignation, real or feigned. For instance, rumors of the leader's possible retirement may be circulated at the party convention in order to whip up political hysteria, with the result that the president is soon besieged with requests that he remain in power lest the nation fall into chaos. President Eyadema of Togo was three times persuaded to remain in office by his people and his party, despite his stated intention to resign. A similar scenario has been played out at party conventions in other countries, such as Cameroon and the

Ivory Coast, where Ahidjo and Houphouet-Boigny were persuaded by their parties to remain in office rather than retire. In these one-party states, the role of the party congress is to strengthen the leader's position. Like elections, the resignation strategy enables the chief of state to test his popularity, bolster his legitimacy, and assure the continuity of his regime.

The death of the leader can also play a part in the routinization of charisma. Generally, either the leader handpicks his own successor before he dies or his staff makes the decision after his death. The man chosen will usually be another charismatic figure with qualities similar to those of his predecessor. If the staff makes the decision after the leader's death, there may be a power struggle over the leadership.

A case in point occurred with the sudden death of Angola's historic leader, Agostinho Neto, in September 1979. Neto had never considered designating a successor, but he did leave behind a well-oiled and highly disciplined political machine, the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), put together during the war for independence. To succeed him, the party chose the current president, Dos Santos, one of Neto's earliest supporters and the man to whom he ordinarily entrusted the reins of government when he was out of the country. He was confirmed as president by a special party congress.

In the Congo, a similar course was followed after the assassination of President Marien Ngouabi, but splits within the ruling party ultimately proved fatal to the man designated to serve as acting president, Yhombi Opango, the most senior and highest ranking officer in the country's army. Because of opposition to Opango within the Congolese Workers Party (PCT), the central committee was forced to consider three candidates: Opango, another officer, Colonel Sassou Nguesso, and a civilian member of the party central committee, Mr. Tchicaya. Opango received fifteen votes, Tchicaya fourteen, and Nguesso seven in the first round of balloting, but on the second round, contrary to all expectation, Nguesso was elected when Tchicaya withdrew in his favor.

The death of Kenyan president Jomo Kenyatta provoked a crisis that was resolved by a combination of political dealing in the party central committee and recourse to constitutional procedures. Eighty-five when he died, Kenyatta had had ample opportunity to prepare for his succession, but avoided doing so for fear of sowing bitter dissension in the ranks of his ruling party, the KANU (Kenya African National Union). As political leaders became increasingly impatient for a solution to the problem of succession, certain changes were made in the country's constitution. These proved insufficient, however, to quell the conflict that ensued upon Kenyatta's death. The constitution provided that a vice-president, appointed by the president, would become acting president for a period of ninety days, during which presidential elections were to be held. The candidates in this election were to be designated by the duly authorized political parties—in reality, therefore, by KANU, the only legal party in Kenya. The constitution further stipulated that if there was only one candidate, no election need be held; hence, if KANU chose to designate a single candidate, he automatically became president of Kenya. In the event, the party split into two factions. One favored the incumbent vice-president, Arap Moi. The other, which opposed him, organized an assassination plot that was to be put into effect on the day following Kenyatta's death. The plan was to murder Arap Moi

in Nakuru, the residence of President Kenyatta. But when Kenyatta died in Mombassa rather than Nakuru, the plan was aborted. Events then followed one another in quick succession. The plot was dismantled, and Arap Moi was sworn in as acting president under the provisions of the constitution. He was then elected chairman of KANU and named as the only candidate for the presidency, making him automatically the head of state. The decision of the party was then bolstered by the usual charisma-enhancing ritual: rallies were held in support of the new president, resolutions of support were drafted, and elections by acclamation were held in various places around the country.

As these examples show, there is a potential for violence whenever a successor has to be chosen for a charismatic leader. It is to the examination of cases of violent change that we shall turn next.

CHANGE BY FORCE: FROM CHARISMA TO INSTITUTIONAL ORDER

A coup d'état may do either of two things: help to routinize charisma or transform a charismatic regime into a legal-rational one. It is common in Africa for masses starved for charisma to invest with charismatic attributes a military leader who has successfully seized power. Typically, the officer is lifted out of obscurity and raised above the general run of mankind on a wave of popular frenzy stirred up by ritual, magic, music, dance, folklore, festivals, and mass demonstrations. Given that the conditions prevailing in some African countries today are not compatible with institutionalized politics, a temporary solution to the problem of transferring power has been found in the coup d'état. As Carl Schmitt has said, "He is sovereign who takes charge in extraordinary circumstances."[7] Now, a crisis of succession creates extraordinary circumstances on which the leader of a coup may capitalize. The cycle is endless: a charismatic regime enters upon a crisis, the crisis is resolved by a coup, the leader of the coup is invested with charisma, and the whole sequence begins all over again.

Striking instances of the transformation of a victorious general into a charismatic figure may be found in Togo, Zaïre, and Benin. In Togo, for example, a referendum held in November 1971 put the following question to a vote: "Do you want General Eyadema to become president of the republic and carry on with the mission entrusted to him by the People's Army?" The overwhelming answer was Yes. Since his 1967 coup, Eyadema has made repeated use of charisma-enhancing techniques of the sort discussed above. In particular, since the 1971 referendum he has often expressed his desire to withdraw from politics and return to the barracks. Now that the army's mission of preserving the unity of the nation is accomplished, presumably it is safe to turn power back over to a civilian government. But the Togolese, fearing a return to anarchy without Eyadema, have always prevailed upon him to remain in power.[8]

If some military dictatorships have served to perpetuate charismatic rule, others have moved deliberately toward the institution of democracy and a return to civilian government based on legal-rational authority. The military itself takes the initiative in drawing up a new constitution, authorizing political parties to resume their normal activities. The liberalization process begins with legislative and presidential elections, followed by a withdrawal of the army

from politics. To be sure, not all such attempts have met with success. But Nigeria and Ghana, after several earlier failures, have recently established multiparty parliamentary regimes.[9]

The normalization process accentuates the legal and rational, rather than the traditional and charismatic, aspects of power. Charisma and tradition may still be influential, however, at lower levels of the political structure. Political parties may, for example, try to organize ethnic, linguistic, regional, or religious groups, or may try to capitalize on the charisma of a former national leader by borrowing his slogans, ideology, or program, while the national authorities may attempt to hinder the activity of parties organized along such lines in order to favor a more legal-rational mode of legitimation. The result is a contest between different kinds of legitimacy, in which the law can be used to set the rules. In such cases, the aim of reinstating normal forms of political activity is ultimately to achieve a political system based on legal-rational forms of authority.

In Nigeria, for example, the military government began liberalizing political life in September 1978 by lifting the ban on political parties that had been imposed by past military regimes over the previous twelve years. Political parties were required to register with a federal electoral commission prior to December 18, 1978. Parties quickly proliferated, and by the deadline, more than forty had registered. But the military authorities, determined to avoid past errors and to prevent a return to regional and tribal politics (which had taken such a toll on national unity), laid down strict rules to ensure that only truly national parties would survive and be able to participate in national elections. To be eligible to participate in the national campaign, a party had to prove to the electoral commission that it was represented in two thirds of Nigeria's nineteen states. Only five of the more than forty parties in the country were able to do so. In this way, Nigeria has been able to establish a form of liberal democracy that closely resembles the American system. Elections are held regularly, and the country's institutions are functioning normally. Pluralist democracy seems to have made an orderly transfer of power possible.

Ghana too has established a pluralist democracy under quite similar conditions. However, the winning party there has borrowed its slogans, program, and ideology from Ghana's former charismatic leader, Kwame Nkrumah, so that elements of charisma linger on. It is nevertheless correct to say that Ghana is firmly on the road to institutionalizing a democratic form of government. Ghanaians now turn to their constitution to resolve the problem of succession.

We have seen, then, that some military dictators have been able to democratize their regimes and thus lay the groundwork for institutionalized politics. The same thing has also been attempted—and achieved—by certain charismatic leaders. Charismatic authority has been successfully transformed into legal-rational authority. It is to the discussion of this kind of change that we turn next, in the third and final section of this essay.

DEMOCRATIZATION OF CHARISMATIC REGIMES

Presidents Senghor of Senegal, Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, and Ahidjo of Cameroon are all charismatic leaders who have successfully trans-

formed their regimes into democratic political systems. But before considering these examples, I shall first examine the case of Houari Boumedienne of Algeria, a case that falls midway between that of the military dictatorship that turns toward democracy, discussed in the previous section, and that of charismatic democratization, to be considered below.

After Algeria's historic national leader Mohammed Ben Bella unexpectedly suspended the constitution and assumed plenary powers, he was overthrown in a June 1965 coup led by General Houari Boumedienne, one of his earliest supporters. Boumedienne became president of both the Revolutionary Council and the state of Algeria, remaining in office until his death in December 1978. He had concentrated so much power in his own hands that, when he became incapacitated for a lengthy period prior to his death, the country was faced with almost insurmountable problems. Although the constitution he had given Algeria did provide for succession to the presidency in case of death or resignation, it did not cover the case of illness or incapacitation. Nor had Boumedienne appointed a vice-president or prime minister, even though the constitution provided for such appointments. The country's other political leaders were thus plunged into a state of deep anxiety when Boumedienne became ill. The Revolutionary Council, which had supplanted the political wing of the National Liberation Front (FLN), temporarily took power. But the president's illness precipitated a power struggle within the council. Hence it was impossible for Algeria to follow the route taken in Angola, the Congo, or Kenya, by having the council appoint one of its members to head the country and then convoke a congress of the ruling party to confirm him in office. When Boumedienne finally died, the situation was somewhat altered. The constitution provided that the president of the National Assembly should become acting president for a period of forty-five days, long enough to allow the ruling party to meet in special congress to designate a candidate for the presidency. But the acting president was prohibited from becoming a candidate himself. It was therefore necessary to look to the Revolutionary Council, of which all of Boumedienne's earliest supporters were members, to find a potential candidate. Boumedienne's opponents now ended their silence and began calling for the inauguration of total democracy, liberation of political prisoners, and immediate elections open to all comers. Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Council split into three factions. The main bone of contention was of course the procedure for designating candidates: Which official body was to be empowered to select the candidate or candidates for the presidency? The opposition parties were officially illegal. But the ruling party, the FLN, had been reduced to a caretaker role since Boumedienne's takeover in 1965. The Revolutionary Council had relieved the party's political wing of its functions pending the party's reorganization, scheduled for 1979. Finally, within the council, none of the three factions was strong enough to dominate. Two were almost equal in size, while the third, much smaller, favored following the constitution and calling a special party congress, even though the party had for many years played only a minimal role in government. In the words of this faction's leader, "A party congress is the only politically feasible and constitutionally lawful way of resolving the crisis of the moment." Meanwhile, the opposition wanted full democratization of the regime, and the army favored strict enforcement of the

constitution: "The officers of the People's National Army declare their unshakable devotion to the Constitution, which they wish to see strictly enforced, in order to carry the Revolution forward and preserve what it has already achieved."[10] In the end, a party congress was convoked to choose Boumedienne's successor.

In the forty-five days following Boumedienne's death, the constitution was strictly adhered to. The president of the National Assembly became acting president, and ordered that a special party congress be held. At the congress, the same factions that existed within the Revolutionary Council made their presence felt. To avoid a deadlock, it was suggested that a candidate be chosen who was not associated with any of the factions. Only one man was acceptable to all the interested groups: Chadly Bendjeddid, an uncommitted Boumedienne supporter. He was chosen to be the party's candidate, elected president on February 7, and sworn in on February 9. Thus, although Boumedienne did not handpick his own successor, he did establish the constitutional procedures that made the transfer of power possible.

Other African leaders have also tried to set procedures for the transfer of power while still in office. Some of these experiments were even more far-reaching than Boumedienne's constitution. In Senegal, for instance, President Senghor personally initiated a process of democratization that culminated in an orderly transfer of power that was without precedent on the African continent. Senghor had of course succeeded in building a one-party state around his own party, the UPS (Senegalese Progressive Union), even though Senegal was a country with long-standing democratic and pluralist traditions. A 1971 constitutional amendment provided for the appointment of a prime minister, and Senghor named a young technocrat, Abdou Diouf, to the post. Further amendments in 1976 did away with the one-party system and reinstated a multiparty regime with at first three and later four legal parties. Even more important, the 1976 revision of the constitution stipulated that the prime minister automatically became president for the remainder of the current term if the president should die or resign.

The UPS, renamed the PS (Socialist Party), ran candidates in the February 1978 elections against the candidates of two other parties, the PDS (Senegalese Democratic Party) and the PAI (African Independence Party). Senghor's ruling party emerged from this election even stronger than it had been, since in this kind of situation, elections serve more as a ritual to enforce charisma than as a way of choosing leaders. The PS took eighty-three of the one hundred seats in parliament, the remainder going to the PDS. Later on, a fourth party was also legalized, but even this did not put an end to the clamor of "illegal" parties for a full multiparty regime. In the midst of this controversy, Senghor announced his retirement. Prime Minister Diouf was sworn in as president on January 1, 1981, before the Supreme Court. He immediately announced his intention to proceed toward a totally democratic regime and a full multiparty system. His term of office runs until 1983, at which time all parties will be free to compete for the presidency.

President Ahidjo of Cameroon is following a similar course. As his plan was originally conceived, succession was not as automatic as in Senegal. The president of the National Assembly was to become acting president for a period

of fifty days if the presidency became vacant. This arrangement did not eliminate the danger of power struggles of the sort we have seen occurring elsewhere. Ahidjo's threats to retire revealed the seriousness of the problem of succession, and each party congress provided renewed evidence of the threat of a power struggle in case the president should die. As a result, Ahidjo took the second step of appointing a prime minister who would become acting president in case of the death, resignation, or incapacitation of the president. The choice of a permanent successor, however, was to be left up to the ruling party. At the 1975 congress of the party, held in Douala, Ahidjo stated that "the selection of a prime minister should not be thought of as the appointment of an heir apparent. God willing, I shall make that choice in conjunction with the party's central committee. It is up to the party to choose my successor and thus to allow our joint efforts to continue."[11] But even this measure could not allay the fears of Cameroon's political leaders or alleviate the ongoing power struggle. Ahidjo therefore took a third and final step: in June 1979 the constitution was amended once again, this time putting the prime minister first in line to succeed the president. Just as in Senegal, if the president is incapacitated, resigns, or dies, the prime minister finishes out his term.

In all three cases we have looked at thus far—Algeria, Senegal, and Cameroon—the emphasis has been more on institutional arrangements and legal technicalities than on politics per se. Now, in a charismatic regime, politics is of course the heart of the matter, and as long as the political problems are not resolved, political leaders will continue to worry about the fate of the regime. This anxiety leads to constant tinkering with the provisions of the constitution in search of a viable political solution. This is what happened in the Ivory Coast, for example, where all of the various constitutional arrangements discussed above were tried out at one time or another, only to be rejected in the end as unworkable. Finally, at the September 1980 congress of the ruling party, the PDCI (Democratic Party of the Ivory Coast), President Houphouet-Boigny opted in favor of a "definitive" political solution. An earlier amendment to the constitution, adopted in 1975, had provided for the president of the National Assembly to complete the unfinished term of the chief of state, at which time national elections would be held. Speculation had been that, instead of this arrangement, a new amendment would provide for the appointment of a prime minister, who would then become the constitutionally designated successor to the president, but this rumor proved false. In Houphouet-Boigny's view, the only answer to the problem of succession was to democratize the regime. But by this he did not mean establishing a multiparty state, as in Senegal. Rather, he favored democratization of the PDCI, through reorganization of its internal structures and an injection of new blood. If the party hoped to survive, the president said, it would have to "abide by the fundamental rules of all true democracies. . . . Our people have come of age. We must decentralize political responsibilities in an orderly way and trust the people to choose their own representatives at every level of government." Thus the definitive solution of the problem of succession, according to the Ivory Coast's president, must rely on universal suffrage and not on mere institutional adjustments. When one reporter asked the president what he had done to prepare the way for his own succession, Houphouet-Boigny first compared himself to George Washington,

who left office voluntarily, and then put the following question to his interlocutor: "Do you think Lenin realized that Stalin would succeed him? Or Stalin that his successor would be Khrushchev? For my own part, I place my trust in people. I am trying to put together a new government. The man who follows me will probably come out of this new cabinet."[12]

After his reelection as president, Houphouet-Boigny put these ideas into practice. He regained control of the ruling party from the political bosses who had allowed it to become rigid and unresponsive. The party was reorganized to allow for greater democracy and to inject fresh blood. Party secretaries were now popularly elected, and young technocrats worked shoulder to shoulder with old political infighters. Where once the party bosses had drawn up the only list of candidates in this one-party state, now elections were free and open. Anyone who wished to run might do so. Neither the party nor its leader, Houphouet-Boigny, would intervene on behalf of any candidate.

But this was not all. Not only would the revitalized party bring forth a new leader, but the people themselves would participate in naming him when the office of president became vacant. Now that the political solution to the problem of succession was in hand, the constitution had to be amended to facilitate its application. Accordingly, the following amendment was adopted: "The president of the republic shall choose a vice-president to be elected along with him. . . . If the office of president becomes vacant as a result of death, resignation, or total incapacitation duly determined by the Supreme Court upon petition of the government, the vice-president shall become, ipso jure, president of the republic for a period not to exceed the unexpired term of office of the previous president."

Thus the system adopted in the Ivory Coast is modeled on the American idea of a "ticket," pairing the president and the vice-president. As a political solution to the problem of succession, this bestows a twofold legitimacy on the man who succeeds to the presidency: first, he benefits from the charismatic authority of his predecessor, who chose him for the job, and second, he obtains the legal-rational (institutional) sanction offered by popular election, coupled with constitutional due process. In this one-party state, these arrangements would appear to offer ample guarantees of continuity.

Since, however, no vice-president has yet been designated, is there not reason to fear a situation such as that which developed in Algeria after the death of Boumedienne? And how can a vice-president be elected now, when the president himself has just been elected for a five-year term that does not expire until 1985? A look at what happened when the National Assembly debated the proposed constitutional reforms will help to shed further light on the changes. When one deputy asked what would happen if the head of state were elected without a vice-president, and the need for a successor arose, the president of the National Assembly answered that "cases make law and not the other way around." He then evoked the case of President Nixon: when Nixon resigned, Vice-President Ford automatically became president, and he in turn named a vice-president who had not been elected. In other words, the president of the Ivory Coast is free to choose his own vice-president until the next presidential elections in 1985, at which time the president and vice-president must run together on a single ticket. Still, since no vice-president has yet been named, the fear remains that a situation may come to pass such as that which occurred in

Algeria upon the death of President Boumedienne.[13] Is Houphouet-Boigny afraid that nominating a vice-president will precipitate a power struggle? Or is he simply waiting for a viable candidate to emerge from within his new government?

* * *

The problem of succession is not unique to African regimes. Any political system must constantly cope with problems arising from the fact that more than one kind of authority is found in any real polity. Different forms of authority are always found in unstable amalgams, and there is always conflict over which principle of legitimacy should dominate. The ultimate goal of any political system is to establish rules governing the transfer and use of power, no matter what form that power may take. The way power is transferred—the mode of succession—is thus an important attribute of any political system.

In today's world, where all national problems become international ones, a government whose mode of succession is securely established inspires confidence not only domestically, but also abroad. This is of great concern to African nations, whose developmental problems involve international as well as internal considerations. In the current geopolitical climate, it is more than ever imperative that states succeed in rationalizing their political behavior. I therefore believe that a rationally organized state is a prerequisite for all national development.

Development, though, involves rationalization not only of political behavior but also of the economic, technological, and cultural aspects of a social system, since each is intimately associated with all the others. Indeed, the types of authority that we have examined in this essay can never really be isolated from other aspects of social reality. Hence the economic, technological, and cultural environment should always be kept in mind when discussing political questions. In the developed countries, such political structures as the nation-state and multiparty parliamentary democracy became stable only after the development of specific forms of social stratification and economic and cultural change. It was only after the global social context had been modified that it became impossible for older charismatic and traditional forms of authority to survive (or at any rate to flourish as they once did).

What emerges, then, from the foregoing analysis is that the rationalization of power may take different forms in different societies. Rationalization cannot run its course, however, until the importance of charismatic and traditional forms of power has waned. In particular, democracy—that is, the broadening of popular participation in political institutions regardless of their type—also appears to contribute to political rationalization.

The approach I have taken in this essay derives from Max Weber. It is of course only one of many possible approaches to the study of political science. Still, I think it has been shown to be useful for understanding the problems of succession, democratization, and political rationalization in African societies, which in turn can help political scientists to gain a deeper understanding of political development generally.

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

References

[1]Weber's theory of charisma is used here only as a convenient instrument for the study of power in Africa. Since the theory has already proved abundantly fruitful in sociology and political science, it seems reasonable to employ it in the study of African societies. Still, it is essential to guard against confusing the nature of the European societies studied by Weber with the quite specific nature of African societies. Charisma, however, is a general concept, useful for the study of any society; Weber studied specifically European variants of charismatic authority, whereas we will be examining African instances of the same kind of power.

[2]Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 79.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Generally speaking, African heads of state acquire charismatic attributes through myth and symbol. One might go so far as to say that charisma is commonly attached to the office itself, and that any head of state automatically becomes a charismatic figure (whether the role suits his character or not). Dictators and tyrants are thus able to make use of their ex officio charisma, as it were, to establish their hold over the people bit by bit. Such leaders as Bokassa, Nguema, and Idi Amin fit this description. On this subject, see especially Jean Girard, *Genèse du pouvoir charismatique en basse Casamance (Sénégal)* (IFAN-DAKAR, 1969).

[5]Erik Erikson, "The Leader as a Child," cited by Jean Lacouture, *Quatre hommes et leurs peuples, sur-pouvoir et sous-développement* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p. 25.

[6]Lanciné Sylla, "*Dictatures aux abois*," afterword to *Flux et reflux des dictatures civiles et militaires en Afrique* (Paris: *Association Française de Science Politique*, 1981), colloquium on the end of dictatorships.

[7]Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie—Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von Souveranität* (Munich-Leipzig: 1934), p. 11.

[8]Lanciné Sylla, *Flux et reflux*.

[9]Ibid.

[10]*Demain l'Afrique* 18 (January 15, 1979).

[11]Ibid., 30 (July 2, 1979): 23.

[12]*Jeune Afrique* 148 (February 4, 1981): 30.

[13]See the report on the National Assembly debate on constitutional reform in *Fraternité matin*, the Ivory Coast's major newspaper, for Thursday, November 27, 1980.