



SPECTRE OF DEMOCRACY AND RESURGENCE OF MILITARY JUNTAS IN AFRICA: A REAPPRAISAL

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Abstract

The triumph of democracy over military regimes in Africa was thought to be a solution to the problems of governance in the continent. Sequel to this, many scholars argue that liberal democracy is effective, secure, transparent, fair, inclusive, and masses oriented. However, the present resurgence of military intervention in some parts of Africa appears to be pointing at liberal democracy as a collapsing political system in the continent. An example of this can be seen in Sudan, Niger, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea where there are now military juntas accompanied with massive jubilation and celebration. A sign of the masses' approval of the counter triumph of military juntas over liberal democracy. Adding to these were the social media comments of many other Africans in Nigeria, Cameroon, Uganda, etc., wishing their military would conduct similar takeovers in their respective countries. What is the bitter pill in liberal democracy that propels resurgence of military interventions in Africa in contemporary times? Could it be that liberal democracy is a western model and unsuited for Africans? In critical response to these fundamental questions, this paper examines democracy in contemporary Africa and the resurgence of military juntas in African States. The study analytically unravels the contents of African democratic politics and governance; its cradle, essence, state, consequences, propelling rationale and functionalists' apologetic arguments to determine whether they are really in consonance with expected democratic principles. The paper also examines the common nature of the African military that appears to make coup d'état attractive to these militaries, and thus inevitable in the African continent. The paper however finds that democracy as practiced in some African countries is not wholly masses oriented, but rather predatory and inimical to the wellbeing of the African larger population. As such, democratic governance in Africa is not largely service driven. It is tainted by the leadership's inordinate quest for capital accumulation from public treasury. In addition, the deep-rooted ethnic divisions which is a hangover from African colonial history, and the utilization of this ethnic configuration by political leaders to stay in power remains a negative force militating against the entrenchment of democratic values and good governance. The study therefore concludes that democratic governance in contemporary Africa is grossly deficient and below global expectations as seen from the resurgence and masses' celebration of military coups in the continent despite the efforts of the African Union (AU) to foster democratic processes and prevent unconstitutional changes of Government (UCG) among member States. The paper affirms that the most important antidote to military coups remains service driven leadership committed to democratic principles, openness and human rights.

Keywords: *African politics; Coup d'état; Democracy; Military Juntas.*

Introduction

There is no doubt that democracy has come to stay in civil societies as an acceptable means of not only choosing leaders, but of wealth creation and rendering good governance (Ekwenze, 2009). This is because democracy; rule of law, accountability, and so on are crucial to capital markets; hence a free market balanced by a democratically elected,



transparent, inclusive and capable government yield stable growth rates and greater social welfare (Henderson, 2021). These factors contribute to stable economies as seen in America, Europe and other parts of the world. These nations have improved quality of living due to the availability of wealth, thereby supporting the suitability of democracy in every human society (Galston & Kamarck, 2022). This is why some scholars argue that liberal democracy is universally effective, secure, transparent, free, fair, inclusive, and masses oriented (Fukuyama, 1992, Wallace, Kundnani & Donnelly, 2021). As such, the expansion of democracy in African states came with global expectations of socio-political and economic development. This expectation is now short lived as present political reality in Africa has demonstrated.

Thus, the institution of democratic regimes as opposed to authoritarian regimes merely constitutes the first step towards the democratization process. This means that the triumph of democracy in African states does not imply the automatic consolidation of true democratic institutions and practices like transparent elections, rule of law, freedom of speech, adequate representation, constitutionalism, and others. The consolidation of democracy also resides with the full conformity and compliance of a country's citizenry, political and military leaders with the demands and principles of democracy. The implication here is that societies devoid of substantial attitudinal changes, support and behavioural compliance with democratic institutions experience pseudo democracy. Thus, the quality of democracy depends heavily on the quality of democrats without which, the political scenario remains like before the coming of democracy (Karabelias, 1998). The AU-convened Reflection Forum (ARF) on 17 March 2022, in Accra, Ghana admits this fact when it appeals to member States, to deploy efforts in promoting democracy and good governance, through holding free, fair and transparent elections; and upholding of term limits, and their respective constitutions.

In the absence of the aforementioned factors, democracy in Africa has remained transactional, predatory and inimical to the wellbeing of the larger population. Hence, it is best described as pseudo democracy and a futile political exercise devoid of forms; investments in policies and structures that propel the growth of common good and commonwealth (Aghamelu & Ani, 2011). As such, many African states accepted democracy in theory but not in practice. This is visible in long years of poor politics and governance; driven by extractive rather than inclusive attitude, unrestrained access to public treasury, undemocratic inimical policies, neglects of rule of law, fiscal discipline, transparent elections, equity and justice.

Visibly therefore, democracy has not proved its worth in many parts of Africa like Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Togo, Zimbabwe, Uganda, DRC, Sudan, Burkina Faso, etc., rather it has made human life "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes, 1985:186). This is



because it is neither inclusive nor driving production, industry, agriculture and market economy. Hence, many African states generally run a consumer economy encompassed by insecurity, predatory politics/governance, poor public resource management, mass poverty and poor human living conditions. Along with these, African economies have not been largely open and transparent or fared better, while just social order and equity remain elusive in diverse states of the continent. African Union (AU) December 6, 2020 14th extraordinary session declaration at Johannesburg acknowledges these situations, citing that Africa still faces complex challenges, particularly gaps in governance and a convergence of vulnerabilities and security challenges.

Though periodic elections are held; the elections and its results are often manipulated by the ruling clique to maintain hold on power. This exposes the helplessness of the African masses who even find it hard to remove undemocratic governments through ballots at the polls. The result has been poor human living conditions, hindrance of initiatives, talents, ambitions, investments, inventions, innovations and weakening of human expectations among the greater African population in Cameroon, Nigeria, Sudan, Niger, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, etc. These indeed raise the question of what becomes the option for African citizenry and stirs the memories of military regimes which is again considered plausible and attractive (Barracca, 2007).

While acknowledging the reality of this democratic conundrum in Africa, new studies and debates relevant to its understanding have unravelled emerging issues around African democracy such as coups and Unconstitutional Changes of Government (UCG). The debates however revolved on the remarks of the American philosopher Sydney Hook (1949) who submits that the most curious phenomena of our time is the manner in which totalitarian regimes sought to wrap themselves in the language of democracy. In this direction, many scholars contend that democracy is the most promiscuous practice in the world of public affairs. This is evident in its diverse interpretations and political practices that are now dressed in democratic garb in African States. As such, authoritarian and semi-authoritarian rulers, mindful of foreign opinion, have dressed their regimes with the outer forms of democracy (Campbell & Quinn, 2021). Yet, elections are frequently rigged by these regimes, and Presidential term limits are often circumvented through constitutional coups.

As many governments across the continent become more authoritarian, Africans are increasingly alienated from those claiming to represent them. This portends no end in sight to episodes of protest, agitation, violence and UCG as already seen in some parts of the continent. Such turmoil will grow as elites compete for power and citizens resist oppressive regimes; all to the inhibition of social and economic development of the



continent's rapidly growing population (Campbell & Quinn, 2021). "This paints a worrying picture of democratic decline and the rise of anti-politics" in Africa (Flinders, 2016:182). On this note, Cheeseman (2021) teaches that manipulations of democratic principles as seen in Africa has brought worrying times for democracy, in which its resultant violent protests, growing criminality and insecurity appear to signal the end of democracy in the continent.

Underlying these poor political developments in Africa is the fact that independence of African states was not tailored to transit politics in the continent towards practical democracy. This is glaring in the in-depth colonial contraptions that from time to time stir conflicting ethnic interests, ethnic divisions, rivalry and violence that militate against entrenchment of true democracy and good governance (Ofoegbu, 2014). In addition to this, is the long history of colonial interest and exploitation that has indelibly taken root in the continent's successive governments, thereby leading to consistent personal, class and tribal interests that militate against the entrenchment of democratic values and good governance. With failing democracy acting as a situational catalyst in Africa, the resurgent military interventions and UCG have been viewed by the masses as patriotic liberation forces. This image is the catalyst of the massive jubilations and celebration of the masses on the streets of the affected countries in support of military takeovers. The masses support also emerges from their comparative similarity, which places military juntas on the same pedestal with the pseudo democracy that stifles the masses' interest, survival and common good. Thus, the celebrated coups in Guinea, Mali, and other similar countries predicates on removal of leaders who had themselves undermined democracy.

It then stands that the larger African population is not sceptical of the appropriateness of liberal democracy and its suitability in the continent. This explains the rationale behind the post military coup protests in some African countries like Sudan, Mali, etc calling for return to democratic rule. The survey conducted by Cheeseman (2021) also shows that Afro pessimists and those who argue that democracy is completely unsuited to Africa, certainly interpreted the combination of political instability and rising authoritarianism to mean that Africans detest democracy. Afro barometer results of the nationally representative surveys conducted in 34 African countries between 1999 and 2021 on public attitudes and perceptions of democracy also shows that majority of African citizenry are dissatisfied with the drivers of democracy in 26 (76%) of the 34 countries. Despite growing public concern about the direction of political travel in Africa therefore, there are evidences of peoples' support for democracy, albeit rooted in their hopes and aspirations for their countries. Hence, many citizens' dissatisfaction with the way democracy is working in the continent has led to stronger demands for accountable and representative government. This, according to Cheeseman (2021) helps to explain why 2021 saw opposition victories in Sao



Tome and Principe and Zambia, as well as protests against corrupt and abusive rule in a wide range of African States from Benin republic, Nigeria, Kenya, to Zimbabwe. As such, the worry of African citizenry borders more on the irresponsible and unpatriotic governance style of drivers of democracy in different parts of the continent which encourages corruption, insecurity, poverty and poor human condition.

Democracy, Military Junta and Unconstitutional Change in Government

The word “democracy” was coined from the Greek words “demo” and “krates” meaning people and rule. This makes the practice appear to have originated from Greece. Yet, democracy as a socio-political practice was practiced in some parts of Africa prior to the knowledge of Greek democracy in the continent. The Igbos in present eastern Nigeria were for instance popular for their republicanism and democratic practices prior to the advent of colonialism, western education and culture (Achebe, 1994). Based on documentation however, democracy is said to have originated from Greek city states; where it was custom for mature male citizens to gather, deliberate and take decisions that affect their society. With this practice, democracy came to be understood as rule by the people. Because eligible members of the society were involved unlike in monarchy and other systems of governance, the Athenian statesman Pericles refers to democracy as the greatest Greek legacy and prospective popular polity to be practiced in the world (Thucydides, 1991, Udebunu, 2008).

The Greek sense of democracy was indeed less noble as it lacked universal suffrage; excludes mature women, labourers and foreigners from political rights and dividends (Mbaegbu, 2008). Worst still, it was predatory as it accorded less ‘human’ status to slaves and greatly exploits them. Despite these historical characters, many countries embraced democracy as the best system of governance; but in a renewed universal form that accommodated all eligible citizens. This universal form incorporated by English, French and American (US) political revolution is now the global standard of democracy in the world. Thus, democracy became understood as a system of governance in which eligible qualified citizens exercise their civic rights and governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves (Appadorai, 2004). This makes democracy a political governance emerging from social contract and hinging on principles of equality, public opinion, social justice, rule of law, transparent elections, exercise of civic rights/duties and promotion of good life (Stumpf, 1994, Onah, 2006). It as well purports democracy as governance that operates on the basis of the general and popular will of the people, implementation of collective purpose and opinions of the citizens (Childs 2010). Yet, democracy is not just purported as only a majority rule but “a governing system based on the will and consent of the governed, institutions that are accountable to all citizens, adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights” (Repucci &



Slipowitz, 2022: 3). It is a network of structures in which those exercising power are subject to checks and balances from independent courts, Press and civil society within and outside the State. Based on this global standard and popular understanding, the one-time US President, Abraham Lincoln defines democracy as government of the people by the people and for the people.

Indeed, the result of unconstitutional change of government is often military juntas. Military junta depicts a group of armed military officers who rule a country after seizing state power by force. It is an illegitimate rule which happens through unconstitutional removal of government. Based on its illegitimate character, Edeh and Ugwueze (2014) explain military juntas as a military government or “an institution of governance that is derived unconstitutionally” (2048). Since the term ‘junta’ is a Spanish word meaning committee or meeting, military junta is an illegal committee or administrative council mainly comprising soldiers who rule a country after a *coup d’état*. Epistemologically therefore, this means that military junta derives not its authority from the ballot box but through the barrels of guns. As such, it is a government without the people’s consent. As such, military junta is understood as an authoritarian government characterized by oligarchic and autocratic military dictatorship.

Military junta could also be understood as a coercive military organization that operates and governs with regimented rules designed to compel docility and obedience from the rest of the citizenry through promulgation of draconian laws, decrees, edicts, martial laws and pronouncements. From this empirical stance, military junta exists in two different forms. There is the disguised military junta visible post President Mohammed Morsi’s government of Egypt which wields and exercises indirect but binding power on the citizens. In this case, the disguised military junta stays behind the curtain but dominantly controls a nominally, feeble and puppet civilian government. Then there is open military junta as seen in Mali, Guinea, etc., which formally seizes power as a country’s governing body and directly rules the people.

The Resurgence of Military Coups and UCG in Africa

The resurgence of military coups and unconstitutional changes in government (UCG) in Africa began about two decades ago. It first manifested in Mauritania with the August 2005 military coup in which President Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya was ousted from office by a group of military officers led by Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall. They promised transition to democratic rule within two years in which none of its members would contest in the elections. Truly, a presidential election took place in March 2007 in which Mr. Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi emerged as President. Yet, another military *coup d’état* in August



2008 led by highranking Generals ousted President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi from office and governed the country through a military junta led by General Mohamed Ould Aziz.

Similarly, President Mamadou Tandja of Niger republic was unconstitutionally removed from office by the military in February 2010 and detained with some members of his cabinet. The coup plotters formed a military government; Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (SCRD) in the capital Niamey headed by the Squadron Chief Salou Djibo. They suspended the constitution, dissolved all state institutions and installed former cabinet minister Mahamadou Danda as the prime minister. This was followed by a transition to democracy that was again disrupted by another *coup d'état* in July 2023 in which General Abdourahamane Tchiani ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, installed Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine as transitional Prime Minister and himself as head of state and national council for the safeguard of the homeland (NCSH).

The allegation of plotting to overthrow the government of Central African Republic (CAR) levelled against the Army Chief of Staff, General Francois Bozize in 2003 led to his sack by President Ange-Felix Patasse. The sacked Chief of Staff fled to Chad where he organised a rebel group. With the help of the Chadian government and CAR military, the former Chief of Staff overthrew the government of President Ange-Felix Patasse in March 2013 and headed a military junta that “dissolved the constitution and jettisoned every constitutional procedure in governance” (Marawako, Sixpence and Mapuvire, 2022, 69). Later, in March 2013, the Seleka Rebel Movement (SRM) overthrew the military government of General Francois Bozize and took over. With these developments, analysts warned that *coup d'état* is contagious, and could spread to other countries in Africa. This warning manifested in Egypt in July 2013 when General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi deposed President Mohamed Morsi and installed a disguised junta as interim government led by Adly Mansour. The interim government had the mandate of transiting Egypt to civilian rule. This was shortly done and the leader of the coup plotters who also doubled as the disguised controller of the interim government; General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was purportedly declared winner of the presidential election and installed as the new president.

In November 2017, the Zimbabwean Defense Forces (ZDF) through a military coup overthrew President Robert Mugabe (Mkhululi & Matshobana, 2020). In defiance of the constitution, the military installed as President the former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa whose sack by President Robert Mugabe triggered the *coup d'état*. General Constantino Chiwenga who led the coup as commander of ZDF became the Vice President. The new military government, however claimed it is stepping in to protect the gains of the liberation struggle from President Mugabe's faction of Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ruling party.



Following the Zimbabwean 2017 military takeover was the April 2019 military *coup d'état* in Sudan. The Transitional Military Council (TMC) toppled the three decades Dictator of Sudan, President Omar Bashir at the unfolding of Sudanese revolution caused by hike in the price of baking floor. The result of this military intervention was a junta headed by the Inspector of the Armed forces Abdel Fattah al-Burham after Ahmed Awad Ibn Auf resigned a day after the coup. Sudan again experienced another military resurgence in October 2021 when Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok was deposed by military officers led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan.

Military junta also resurged in Mali in August 2020. The junta led by Colonel Assimi Goïta toppled President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta's government. The junta proposed to remain in power for three years before transition to civilian rule. In defiance to domestic and international condemnation, the junta in September 2020 produced an Interim Governing Transitional Charter (IGTC) in which it maintains its subsequent role in Mali's political affairs. They then installed retired Colonel Major Bah N'Daw as interim President, Moctar Ouanne as Prime Minister and coup leader Colonel Assimi Goïta as interim Vice President. Yet again in Mali, there was what can best be described as 'a coup within a coup' in May 2021 (Akinfenwa, 2022). This was based on the arrest and toppling of the transitional President Bah Ndaw and Prime Minister Moctar Ouanne by the same military junta led by Colonel Assimi Goïta that installed them as part of the transitional government.

Following the sudden death of President Idris Debby in the battle with *Boko Haram* terrorists at the border with Nigeria in April 2021, the Chadian military embarked in an unusual *coup d'état*. The coup plotters disregarded and abrogated the national constitution, dissolved parliament and government, and hurriedly installed Mohamat Debby as President and leader of the Transitional Military Council (TMC). The new leader is a soldier and the son of the late President Idris Debby, who led a military coup three decades ago against Hissene Habre. Equatorial Guinea also experienced a resurgence of military coup in September 2021. President Alpha Conde was toppled in the capital Conakry by the special armed forces under the command of Colonel Mamady Doumbouya. They dissolved the constitution, government and its institutions, and announced thirty-nine-month transition to civil rule.

Recently however was the January 2022 military takeover in Burkina Faso which forced President Roch Marc Christina Kabore out of office. This was following public outrage over government handling of bloody Jihadist insurgents linked to Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The coup is led by Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who immediately dissolved the government, parliament, government institutions and constitutional procedures. September 2022 also witnessed another military coup in Burkina



Faso led by Captain Ibrahim Traore. The leader of this latest junta has been installed the new head of state and transitional president by Burkina Faso's military officials, political parties and civil society in defiance of the sanctions of UN, AU and ECOWAS meant to see the return of Burkina Faso to civilian rule. The most recent *coup d'état* led by General Brice Oligui Nguema has now taken place in Gabon on August 30, 2023 after a fraudulent election, in which the incumbent President Ali Bongo Ondimba was declared winner. Following these military juntas in Africa were also series of failed *coup d'état* which has happened in Madagascar, etc. Commenting on these coups and UCG, AU-convened Reflection Forum (ARF) on 17 March 2022, reveals manipulation of democratic processes, constitutional coups by many African democratic governments and the violation of stipulated national democratic principles, rules and procedures for constitutional amendment as their bedrocks. These factors are in consonance with the reasons purported by the coup plotters who cite poor governance, corruption and unbearable human living conditions as major reasons for their intervention. The coup plotters characteristically promise a transition to civil rule, yet the past military experiences in Africa make manifestations of these promises' bleak.

While condemning these military coups, new debates and studies point to the emerging issues around African democracy such as governance and democratic deficits and breach of human rights and freedom which serve as catalysts for coups and UCG. In this direction, Amani Africa special research report no 10 (2021) have come to perceive coup/UCG as a problem and a symptom of other problems. Coup/UCG constitutes a major constitutional crisis, political and institutional instability, economic uncertainties, and exacerbates existing economic woes in the continent. Referring to these emerging issues in African democracy that culminate in coups, Mbaku (2020) contends that UCG begins with serving democratic leaders using legislatures to change constitutional term limits or eliminate age limits for Presidents in order to elongate their stay in power. However, weak political institutions and absence of democratic culture creates a ground on which the incumbent manipulates the constitution and effect constitutional coups. Constitutional coup presents one of the greatest risks to democracy in Africa. This is as it quashes the check on presidential excesses, creates a condition that makes it difficult for opposition to participate competitively in election, and creates a context for occurrence of coups (Amani Africa policy brief, 2022). With these increasing political discrepancies and persistent pseudo democracy in Africa, concern is heightening that subsequent years could become a harvest of military juntas and UCG in the continent.

Major triggers of *Coup d'état* and UCG in African Continent

Though military coups did not originate in Africa, the phenomenon is becoming endemic in Africa despite efforts made to democratize the continent. The contributing factors to these military interventions in Africa among others include the following.



Foreign interests

Wiking (1983) observed that foreign interests as a factor in coups and UCG in Africa can be extremely difficult to verify. He notes that direct evidence of foreign intervention in hoisting military regimes can be a dangerous weapon in the hands of those who oppose military coups. Such matters therefore are kept as top secret by all concerned. Along this lane, Sany (2022) who heads United States Institute of Peace (USIP) programs in Africa alleges that policies, interests, and rivalries between outside powers like France and Russia are combining with popular grievances to produce coups and UCG in Africa. However, it is on record that most African army officers are exposed to training and short courses abroad in addition to several foreign military advisers working in the continent to help beef up the professional competence of African troops. Atah-Asamoah (2019) documents that French military personnel influences military responses to national challenges and contribute significantly in building the capacity of national armies in Mali and Sahel region. It would be naïve to assume that these foreign powers do not exploit these contacts for their own national interests. Indeed, the foreign investments in loans, businesses, coupled with cheap raw materials in the continent, will not make foreign governments indifferent to who assumes the mantle of leadership in African countries.

Nature of African Militaries

The military system in Africa has a colonial aggressive foundation. The aim of establishing these forces by the colonists was to crush dissidents, divergent views, indigenous oppositions, and to protect colonial interests. Owing its origin to the colonial period, Ezeugwu and Obiora (2008) affirm that the military in various African states became the “instrument used by colonial masters to intimidate, harass and suppress the genuine nationalist struggle for independence and genuine democracy” (76). This foundation makes the military a tool of domination and a threat to liberal democracy. As such, it is difficult to fully subordinate African militaries to civilian rule. Hence, military *coup d'état*, and all manners of rebellion and resistance as now seen in Sudan, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, etc may characterize African militaries till the institutions undergo decolonization, reformation and transition in accordance with the tenets of liberal democracy.

Another character of African militaries that makes it susceptible to *coup d'état* is the fact that diverse militaries of African countries have tasted and enjoyed the dividend of power as well as unrestrained access to public wealth for a long period of time. This reality is now unfolding in Sudan and Mali as the military juntas openly declared their interests in national affairs and constantly elongate their stays in office. Many of the officers and men therefore know the lucrative nature of African leadership and only wait for opportunities to seize power from democratic governments.



Military coups are common in Africa as most democratic governments incorporate military personnel in governance and make them part and parcel of democratic discussions, decision and policy making. In party rallies, congresses, functions, general elections and democratic gatherings, politicians and their cronies as seen in Nigeria assume command of these militaries, ordering and directing them on what to do. Idongesit (2021) views this rapport as bringing the military into “domestic politics”; a vestige that inspires military intrusion in politics (80). These civilians’ over flaunted actions inculcate in these militaries their indispensability in governance, and thus lures them to sack civilian governments to assume political responsibility. In line with this, politicians and most people serving in democratic governments in the continent corrupt and expose them to situations that propel military takeover. For instance, members of the military are sometimes used as errand men/women under the guise of political assignments. Some are also used as henchmen to carry out nefarious activities against perceived enemies, opponents, oppositions and dissidents. Huge money is also given to gratify some of them based on friendship or in gratitude for little functions and assistance. These expose the weakness of those in government and wrongly signal to these soldiers that there is money in politics and governance. Again, many leaders of democratic governments in Africa such as Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Emmerson Mnangagwa of Zimbabwe, Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, etc are mostly ex-military officers, rebel leaders or militants. Such people contest democratic elections wearing civil uniform without undergoing orientations necessary in transiting them into true civilian democrats. Worst still, these ex-service men and women have high ranking rivals who envy their personalities and covet their political positions.

More so, the military background of these democratic leaders influences them to flood their governments with serving and ex militaries. Thus, most African leaders govern in open alliance with the military and in grand military style with draconian policies, pronouncements, exploitative bills and laws. This is why Onikan in Onuh (2001) metaphorically laments about African democracy saying, “While we are hearing new music, it is very much the same music and above all the old dancers. This is why so much is not happening” (19). In congruence with this, Kukah (2009) further laments that the so-called liberal democracy in Africa was actually a continuation of military junta, feudalism, autocracy, duplicity and fraud that is now largely supervised by the cabal within the military.

Besides, professionalism and careerism appear to have deteriorated in most African militaries. This is unlike in the west where many people in the military pursue their careers as soldiers and achieve fame in that direction. Along with this is the prevailing gross ineffectiveness within most African militaries. Military ineffectiveness comprises of the poor initiative and inability of commanders to coordinate different military units



(Marawako, Sixpence and Mapuvire, 2022). These are followed by the pauperization of the military personnel in many African countries through poor salaries, remuneration and emoluments. This is further aggravated by their poor accommodations and inadequate basic amenities in the barracks which is nothing to write home about. In addition to that, some of these militaries are poorly equipped for their jobs. Yet, complaints against the supply of poor equipment by military personnel are often treated as rebellion by democratic governments through the Force headquarters. This was the fate that befell many Nigerian soldiers that complained of poor equipment of the military fighting *Boko Haram* terrorists in the northern part of the country. Policemen that protested poor and delayed salaries in the Nigerian capital Abuja in May, 2022, also suffered similar fate from the police headquarter. Since expression of opinion and grievances are largely misunderstood by democratic governments and Force headquarters, this makes resurgence of military junta inevitable in African continent.

The Public Perception of the Military as an Alternative to Civil Misrule

Despite African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and foreign governments' condemnation of the wave of military coups and their efforts towards restoring civilian rules, the reactions of the masses were different from expected. In Sudan, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso for instance, thousands of people took to the streets to welcome the military junta; jubilating and celebrating with soldiers for overthrowing and imprisoning their Presidents. From some of the placards showing the feelings of the masses, AU, ECOWAS, were even rebuked by the people in places like Mali for sanctioning the military leaders whom they believe are serving their interests (Akinfenwa, 2022). The rationale behind such massive jubilatory reactions however hinges on people's total disappointment with their democratic leaders whose rules have worsened their living conditions.

The African masses are faced with hopelessness in handling authoritarian civilian regimes. This is because such regimes almost control every institution ranging from the judiciary to the press. This leaves the civil population with no other option than to look to the military to rescue them. The usual periodic elections that give citizens a voice in a democratic society to change bad leaders are hardly transparent in most African states. Thus, elections in most African countries are mere formalities as the results are predetermined. This explains the jubilant mood that follows military takeover of government in many African countries.

Yet, a critical look into the past military juntas reveals a promising beginning that never delivers the basic needs of the masses. The most worrisome aspect is the military's antecedent for *sit-tight in office*. The military's usual promise of transiting to democratic



rule within the shortest possible time hardly materializes without extending their grip on power for much longer. A recent instance of this is the current Malian military junta that promised to hold elections in February 2022, but requested five years more to remain in power before returning the country to democratic rule.

Pseudo Democracy in Africa

The major reason for the resurgence of military coups in Africa is the failure of democracy. Considering the unfolding political realities in many African states, it is glaring that many African governments operate pseudo democracy. Pseudo democracy is a “political system that parades itself as democratic but offers no true elements of democracy for the citizens” (Akinfenwa, 2022:1). Pseudo democracy is not people or service driven, but rather suppressive, oppressive, coercive and incapable of delivering the expected public good (Onuigbo, 2005). As practiced in most African states, governance is applied in ways suitable to the whims and caprices of the ruling class, and to the discontent of the larger African population. In pseudo democracy, the rule of law is hardly regarded and the judiciary is visibly compromised. Concerned about this situation, AU 14th extraordinary session at Johannesburg in December 2020 condemns all manner of “manipulation of democratic processes to effect constitutional amendments or revisions for entrenching power of the incumbent in violation of the national democratic principles, and stipulated rules and procedures for constitutional amendment”. Being a pseudo democracy, governance in Africa is financially attractive with humongous salaries, unchecked access to public coffers and unaccountable condition of service. This is coupled with consumer economy which anchors more on severe taxation of the masses, importation of goods and services rather than indigenous production and exportation. These make democracy in many African states a rogue and predatory system in which resources or economic rents extracted from the public are often diverted to private uses (Evans, 1989; Fukuyama, 2012). Forsyth (1982) describes this type of governance as spoil system revealing that in many African states;

Political power means success and prosperity, not only for the man who holds it but for his family, his birth place and even his region of origin. As a result, there are many who will go any length to get it, will surpass themselves in order to get it (15).

Consequently, larger African masses have been impoverished within the few decades of democracy in the continent. This is as the system deprives the talented of stable environment and adequate incentives necessary in pursuing and actualizing genuine projects (Chinweuba, 2020).



Truly, the fear of Plato and Aristotle that democracy often turns to oligarchy, plutocracy and tyranny have manifested in Africa (Aghamelu & Ani, 2011). And because of the power and access it gives to illegitimate wealth, leadership positions in African democracy are monetized by political parties for the highest bidders. The emerged plutocrats then enter the transactional race of money politics consisting of bribing the parties' delegates in order to acquire the highest vote casts in the party primary elections and emerge as the party flag bearer which guarantees one to contest an elective position. It is actually the party's internal structures and mechanisms that deprive the masses of the choice of best candidates in many African elections. Thus, the masses are merely at the polls to formalize any of the preferred candidates projected by political parties. Since such governments do not truly emerge from means popular and acceptable to the masses, they are not considered as the popular will of the people. This is why many people consider winners of elections in many African states as usurpers lacking legitimacy.

Exacerbating this non confidence of the masses in African democracy is neglect of purported ideology by the so-called winners of elections and incessant defections from one political party to another. In all these pseudo democratic practices, critics are not spared, and opposing views are ignored as non-concomitant with the mission of government. Along this lane, democratic practices like public opinion, referendum and restructuring are totally neglected. Yet, in grand military style, some African elected leaders even extend their constitutional terms in office and rig elections to hold on to power ((Mbaku, 2020). Some others as in the cases of former Presidents Alpha Conde of Guinea and Ibrahim Keita of Mali changed the constitution to elongate their tenures in office. This clearly shows the unwillingness of the African political elite to submit themselves to the popular will of the people as contained in the constitution. This in itself is very disheartening to see: watching African leaders violate the same constitution that brought them to power and which they swore to uphold.

Also manifesting in pseudo democracy of many African countries is an inimical ethical subjectivism that conflicts with objective political morality. Projecting this subjective moral order are stakeholders of ruling parties who have formed cabals and "gangster clubs" rigging elections by all means, hijacking party and national machineries, and consolidating political positions for their selfish motives. In subjective moral order seen in African politics, the rule of law and other principles of democracy are supplanted by the ruling party (Areji, 2005). This Machiavellian moral order predicates on holding political power and governing the state by all means. This morality states that;

whatever action the government takes which is not detrimental to the people in government irrespective of the



drastic consequences on the governed is moral, good and just. This is the only morality that will ensure uninterrupted succession, corruption and disregard for accountability, nepotism and despotism, eventual extinction of opposition (Individual, group and political party) and finally, the emergence of one-party state (Areji, 2005:56).

Sequel to these incessant poor political situations in many African countries, the social contract binding the state and individual is constantly reneged. This is why the late Nigerian despot Sani Abacha describes the pseudo democracy in Africa as “home-made democracy” (Arua, 2009: 79). Odey (2002) depicts it as government not by the people, but by an organized clique, cabal, political jobbers, looters and robbery consortium that collaborate with imperialists to convert leadership into breeding ground for unemployment, insecurity, hunger and hopelessness. Democracy in Africa therefore undermines its citizenry; their inalienable rights, privileges, freedom and efforts. It does so by excluding them from governance, ignoring public opinion, persecuting and repressing activists, criticizing anyone whose loyalty is in doubt (Chinweuba, 2019). In addition to this, it surrounds the people with harsh living condition and extort them through state actors such as law enforcement agents, government officials, and non-state actors such as touts which government often use to exact taxation from the public (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). Therefore, the larger African population appears not to have fared better in the decades of democracy in the continent (Cheeseman, 2021). This can be seen as functional basic amenities are inadequate, coupled with the sad reality that insecurity triggered by the menace of robbers and terrorists are gaining momentum in the continent.

Amidst all these, Africa has largely become a political theatre of human right abuses, subversion of democratic principles and political and economic exploitation of the masses. Along this lane, justice as conceived by Trasymachus manifests in the interest of the strong who are often those in government (Plato, 1997). And with relationship tilting into “might is right”, the larger African population now show loyalty by coercion or dim of favour (Stumpf, 1994). These conundrums have become fertile grounds for resurgence of military juntas and UCG in the continent.

Historicizing Pseudo Democracy in Africa

The independence of many African states was not structured to yield good governance for the people. Hence why the pseudo democratic practice in Africa that now ushers in military juntas started post-independence. James Booth in Achebe (1998) draws attention to the unfortunate independence political thoughts and principles of African vanguards of liberal democracy which became the foundation of poor democratic governance that now paves



way for the present wave of military juntas in the continent. For instance, excerpts from the Nigerian Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe's and Chief Obafemi Awolowo's memoirs read,

...henceforth I shall utilize my earned income to secure my enjoyment of a high standard of living... I am going to make myself formidable intellectually, morally invulnerable, to make all the money that is possible for a man with my brains and brawn to make in Nigeria (Achebe, 1998: 13-14).

Referring to these unfortunate thoughts and principles, the Nigerian Constitution Drafting Committee (1979) criticizes the vanguards of African democracy for their "pre-occupation with power and material benefits, while political ideologies as to how a society can be organized and ruled to the advantage of all hardly entered their calculation" (35). These unfortunate legacies were however exacerbated by the unfavourable situation in which African democrats at independence were presented with ready-made but weak and poorly structured countries characterized by deep rooted ethnic divisions, enormous executive powers and little or no strong institutions that would check the abuse of these powers (Akinola, 1994). With this socio-political heritage, the pristine African politicians considered themselves as colonial replacements with greater focus on getting rich from the public treasury (Onah, 2006). Consequentially, the post-independence governance in many African countries became a sham, and sadly failed to entrench democratic values and good governance.

Unfortunately, this has now become the foundation of the present pseudo democracy in the continent. As such, the national treasury, national total asset and even the currencies of many African states have continued to collapse in every democratic dispensation. In reference to this, Ukwuaba (2002), Ani (2009) and Chinweuba (2020) document that economic collapse resulting from poor democratic practice in Africa has been consistent. Their findings show that many democratic governments in the continent refrain from applying the essential objectivity, patriotism, selfless service, responsiveness and discipline necessary in entrenching practical democracy in their countries.

Propelling Rationale and Functionalists' Apologetic Arguments for African Pseudo Democracy

The propelling rationale behind African pseudo democracy constitutes the challenges of democratizing African states. Among these rationale or challenges are the driving forces of poverty and greed. These forces breed every kind of social dysfunction in African politicians and ruling class; such as the feeling of financial insecurity and irrational pursuit of wealth (Fukuyama, 2012). Since most Africans have trailing history of poverty, coupled



with the increase in poor masses in the continent, there is the tendency to always live above this deplorable condition. Some politicians however are incapable of controlling their greed; hence they view political offices as means of looting common wealth. In order to accomplish this, these politicians employ every machination to disrupt the democratization of African states.

Propelling pseudo democracy in Africa are the poor systems and structures already in place prior the advent of liberal democracy. These include classic and juicy offices, humongous salaries, allowances, entitlements and benefits, windfalls, kickbacks, immunity of some state actors, enormous power of the state actors, and so on. These poor systems and structures have been incorporated into the present democracy which has made political offices in Africa attractive to non-service driven candidates and the military. Consequently, these non-service driven candidates indulge in huge and illegal expenses at the party and campaign levels in order to galvanize supports to win electoral or buy political positions (Akubue, 2010). Along this line are electioneering campaigns that revolve on “god-fatherism”, bribing the electorates, party members, party delegates, electoral bodies and stakeholders, who aid the manipulation of the electoral processes. Coupled with these, politics in Africa is largely viewed as a financial investment, and governance is seen as viable means of compensation, actualizing returns and maximum profits. Democracy is also viewed by many African political office holders and public wealth profiteers as means of impoverishing, intimidating and subduing the masses in order to render them susceptible to constant control. Consequently, democratic principles are not fully hearkened to in many successive regimes in Africa.

Moreover, democracy in Africa is as well propelled by social expectations in most indigenous cultures. These social expectations are part of the normal traditional family, kinship and community ties, obligations, loyalties, reciprocity and relations (Ogugua, 2003). Yet these socio-cultural expectations laden public officials with burdensome financial responsibilities that make them take advantage of their democratic positions and indulge in corruption (Gyekye, 1997). In most of these African indigenous cultures, one’s social status, worth and recognition are measured and recognized based on the amount of one’s accumulated wealth (Ani, 2009). Being relevant in politics and holding on to power in Africa however give access to this type of wealth and riches that guarantee one immediate honour, recognition and social domination without much ado or consequence. This propels the tendency of democratic leaders to subvert democratic principles and plunder the commonwealth to satisfy these cultural demands.

In cognizance of these propelling socio-political and cultural realities, there are many arguments in favour of poor democratic governance in Africa. The most interesting of these



arguments is the functionalists' apologetic perspectives which hinge on justifying the notion: *the worst democratic rule is better than the best military rule*. The functionalists' arguments therefore revolve on the purported beneficial aspects of poor democratic governance in Africa visible in the docility and relative peace it has created. Functionalists maintain that democracy as it is in Africa have largely created a docile society that is not only nonchalant to poor governance, but is ready to accommodate all forms of poor leadership. Consequently, functionalists argue that African countries are largely devoid of civil disobedience and conflicts visible in other continents where people are intolerantly conscious of pseudo democracy. On the other hand, Functionalists claim that African democracy is growing, hence it will in time acquire more experiences in democratic acculturation, improve on people's expectations and shed off the factors responsible for military interventions. As such, functionalists argue that African democracy will in time advance to an expected stage and maturity where human freedom, rights, privileges, government responsiveness and accountability will be guaranteed.

In addition to this, functionalists affirm that democracy as it is currently practiced in the continent is inadequate in provision of dividends; hence it has encouraged mass migration of African citizen in search of 'greener pastures. Most of these migrants, functionalists argue, get exposed to modern economic systems and technology that enhances economic growth more than those in Africa (Ajaegbu, 1976). Consequently, apologists hold the last opinion that most of these migrants return with new ideas, such as; initiating and generating production of goods and services in Africa, and enhancing employment and payment of taxes and levies to their different governments. Functionalists further state that most of these African migrants even send money home which strengthens their relationship with their relatives and increase government externally generated revenue.

Furthermore, the functionalist school of thought maintains that pseudo democracy prevalent in Africa has encouraged 'home based' citizens to depend more on their abilities for survival rather than on government. This attitude, according to functionalist apologists, is the catalyst behind the massive economic struggle among Africans. This struggle now results to resounding entrepreneurial initiatives, skills, ambition, competitions, enterprises and hard work which drive economic reliance and improved quality of human life (Chinweuba & Ezeugwu, 2017). However, Functionalists reveal that pseudo democracy in the continent have on the other hand created (corrupt) millionaires and billionaires whose influences have put Africa on the global map. As interesting as these functionalist arguments sound, they are not in line with universal democratic principles. Even worse, pseudo democracy advances political activities that complicate the existing poor human condition in the continent as it militates against legitimate enterprise and investment. It therefore stands that pseudo democracy in Africa has done more harm than good.



Conclusion and Recommendations

Although people go to the polls and leaders emerge, political practices in many African countries are not truly democratic. This is as it is devoid of the fundamental democratic principles; accountability, transparency, rule of law, respect for human right and inclusiveness. As such, democracy in Africa has neither improved the quality of human life nor guaranteed sustainable development in the continent. These do not however translate to Africans abhorring democracy as a socio-political system. Larger African population rather abhors the inappropriateness of democratic practices and irresponsible and unpatriotic governance of drivers of democracy in the continent. Sadly, the undemocratic manner through which many governments emerge in Africa dampens their legitimacy and reflects the rareness of conviction that they possess the requisite capabilities, integrity, vision, commitment, sound morality and will power to lead the continent to greater height. The political cracks emanating from pseudo democracy in the continent indeed paves way for military intervention in the politics of African countries. And the contempt for this avoidable crack in African politics has become reflected in masses' jubilations that welcome these resurging military juntas.

These notwithstanding, Africans view democracy as the most fashionable form of governance in the world. This is because of the societal advancement associated with it, as well as its tenets which many assume has the potential of resolving the problem of governance in human societies. This signifies that democracy is suited for the African continent as it is in other parts of the world. Yet, its present failure in Africa is the failure of the vanguards of democracy. Curbing this failure however warrants that **ECOWAS, African Union (AU) and other international bodies change tactics, as it has become obvious that sanctions which were copied from the west as a means of pressuring a regime have minimal effect. Such sanctions even bring more hardship on already traumatized and pauperized citizens rather than those in government. In the context of changing tactics therefore, it has become imperative for AU, ECOWAS, and other regional and international bodies to** cover the gaps in their norms on coups and UCG. Among these gaps is the disconnection between norms on UCG and the background context; governance and democratic deficits and breaches of human rights and freedom that cause UGC and coups. Another gap in the norms of these bodies is the absence of mechanisms for dealing with manipulation of election results, term limits and age limits of Presidents which stand as constitutional coups. Another gap is the absence of clarity in the application of norms banning UCG in cases of popular uprising and the military's involvement to contain the impasse. Along with these, AU, ECOWAS, etc need to clarify the required conditions that exactly certify establishment or restoration of constitutional order in a country affected by coup or UCG that warrants removal sanctions.



Indeed, the international communities should be more concerned about fostering key ingredients of democracy; press freedom, equity, accountability, rule of law, etc in Africa. They should find viable means of ensuring that those in government embark on practical delivery of democracy dividend. Only then will the greater African population trust their elected governments and cease considering military junta as a viable alternative to liberal democracy.

Fostering democracy and curbing military junta however require servant leaders. These are leaders that do not neglect human rights, nation building, sustainable development, economic emancipation of the masses and confuse public office with avenues for making personal wealth. Indeed, African states need governments with the dynamic capacity to employ epistemic and metaphysical choices towards surmounting national challenges. These are leaders with enough sagacity to create hybrid ideas that will help Africa overcome poverty, political instability and other human conditions that fan the ember of military resurgence in the continent. Sadly, power is highly over valued in Africa. And until power is rightly valued in the continent as sacrificial service, there may be no end to corruption, violent struggle for power, resurgence of military coups and UCG.

The corrupt ways in which constitutions and elections are manipulated by the executives to entrench themselves in power against the wish of the masses is one major reason why democracy fails in Africa. Democracy is founded and sustained on the principle of justice, fairness and utmost recognition that power belongs to the people and must ultimately be returned to them at agreed intervals. Power elongation by the executives through bribing the legislators and manipulating referendum to ratify such self-serving constitutional fraud has remained a prominent feature in the African political landscape that necessitates military coups. Democracy therefore thrives and is sustained when elected representatives respect the tenets of the constitution that brought them to power. When politicians abuse the tenets of the constitution, there is no basis to compel the military to remain within the bounds of the constitution.

It is pertinent to note that most African politicians are averse to criticism. These leaders perceive critical comments as insults and disrespect. This may be fallout from African traditional cultures, in which kings are revered and always praised by their subjects (Ezeugwu, 2019). Yet, modern African leaders forget that criticism dialectically births new ideas that advance societal development, justice, fairness and peaceful co-existence. We therefore counsel that African leaders must of necessity learn to respect contrary views so as not to resort to authoritarianism and dictatorial tendencies. To sustain democracy in Africa, political or democratic education must be integrated in the educational curriculum of diverse countries in the continent. In addition, political education, workshops and



seminars must be extended to every rural community in the continent. This will enable the people defend democracy better; for the best defenders of democracy are the people, not the military. This is why a coup can only succeed when the masses are in support of it, and there is high level of peoples' dissatisfaction and indignation against a government.

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