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Democracy and Development in Africa: Demystifying Democracy as the Best Form of Government

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Abstract

The resurgence of coups d'état in Africa has resuscitated discussions about the suitability of democracy as an agent of development on the Continent. The dominant impression in extant literature suggests that the inefficiencies of democratic regimes provide the attractive invitation to military rule. Despite the encomiums showered on democracy as the global best form government, many years of its practice in Africa have resulted in massive underdevelopment. It has not delivered on its promise of free and fair elections, freedom of the press, association and others. Under the watch of democracy, many African countries have transited from one-party to dominant-party states while rigging and related electoral vices continue to fester. Police brutality and human rights abuses are rampant while insecurity and inequality have reproduced themselves in many forms. This paper contends that democracy is culpable in the business of stifling development in Africa hence, the complexity and continuity of Africa's crisis of underdevelopment questions the validity of Western imposition of Democracy as the best form of government. It adopts an amalgam of the Liberal Democratic and Centre-Periphery Models to situate the failure of democracy in Africa within the context of metropolitan interference in African politics, with attendant African petit bourgeois attachment to foreign finance capital. Consequently, it denounces democracy as the best form of government and insists that Africa's best form of government is that which arises out of her sociological experience and censorship to address critical aspects of her political economy.

Keywords: Africa, democracy, development, military rule, government.

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Introduction

At the dawn of the 18th Century, Democracy which had existed as far back as 5th Century BC Athens gained popularity as the world's best form of government. Democracy, famously defined by Lincoln (1863) as the “government of the people, by the people and for the people” was rehabilitated and reintroduced to the world by the champions of global capitalism as the best vehicle for good governance in a world battered and buffeted by the effects of human greed and avarice. Democracy was promoted as the epitome of probity in governance, and was considered a *sine qua non* for development, with the promise of freedom and prosperity for all who adhered to its tenets. Unfortunately, after nearly 300 years since the rebirth of democracy, the world is still in shambles. Democracy had not prevented two world wars while states were still controlled by the minority in many jurisdictions. Accountability in governance was still imperilled by massive official sleaze while man remained in chains either in the traditional slave society or in capitalist, feudal and other quasi-democratic societies. The promise of development was only actualized in a few places like Europe and the Americas which confiscated the freedom of able-bodied Africans in the slave society to advance their own development, despite the avowal of freedom as a basic democratic right. According to Angalapu (2023), many years of democracy have not engendered socioeconomic development or security in Africa.

The “fall” of democracy in Mali, Chad, Guinea, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Niger and Gabon has been greeted with widespread popular support, jubilation and excitement (Melly, Mensah, Rivero, 2023; Chinweuba and Ezeugwu, 2024), confirming the suspicion that democracy has not met the people's needs. Consequently, the debate about military rule as the pathway for African development has now resurfaced. Accordingly, as the citizens of many of the coups-hit countries relish the euphoria of military intervention, the impression that the worst democracy is better than the best military rule becomes central. The emphasis on military rule in Africa is crucial, in view of the fact that historically, the greatest antithesis of democracy in Africa is military rule (Aka, 1999). Interestingly, in spite of the global aversion to military dictatorships, democracy appears not to have justified its reputation as the best form of government in Africa and beyond.

Theoretical Perspective

This paper adopts the Liberal Democratic thought as its framework of analysis with support from the Centre-Periphery Model. 18th Century Liberalism is a political and socioeconomic ideology best considered as the poster boy of the Age of Enlightenment, and usually credited to the English philosopher and physician John Locke. Originating from the Lockean treatise on the “social contract,” and gaining one of its most important expressions in the unanimous declaration of independence by

what was once the thirteen united states of America, Liberalism sought to negate aspects of medieval feudal absolutism like the “divine right of kings”, political ascendancy by hereditary privileges, traditional conservatism, monarchy, theocracy etc., by emphasizing the freedom of the individual and his inalienable right to pursue economic, political and social undertakings without encumbrances. As a political ideology, Liberalism emphasizes representative/participatory democracy vis-à-vis periodic elections and multiparty politics, rule of law etc. At the economic level, Liberalism puts premium on the free market economy by way of trade liberalization or “laissez faire,” while its social dimension emphasizes the primacy of fundamental human rights of individuals to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Conversely, the Centre-Periphery Model popularized by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 70s explains *inter alia* the nature of the relationship between less developed former colonies in Africa and the rest of the Third World (described as the peripheral countries), and the highly developed capitalist powers (described as the Core or Centre or Metropole), which were often responsible for colonizing the former. The Centre-Periphery Model assumes that several decades after the retreat of colonialism, there is an element of metropolitan control on the former colonies, which partly explains their seeming inability to detach themselves from an exploitative global capitalist production relation in which they are perpetually subordinated. The usual scholarly emphasis on the need for the peripheral formations to break the shackles of globalization in order to attain true and sustainable development appears to have become inutile in the wake of what may be considered as the Stockholm’s Syndrome of international relations which tallies with Igwe (2005)’s description of the strengthening of links with global capitalism rather than de-linking from global capitalism as a strategy for overcoming the socioeconomic and political burdens of the periphery. The Core-Periphery analysis or Centre-Periphery Model further assumes that within the Central states, there is a centre and periphery consisting of the global decision-making oligarchs and the rest of the people respectively, and that within the peripheral states, there is also a centre and periphery consisting of an indigenous petit bourgeoisie and the local proletariat respectively. It therefore anticipates that the interests of the Centre of the Centre and the centre of the periphery should necessarily align, in the same manner as those of the Periphery of the Centre and the periphery of the periphery. Prior to Wallerstein’s contributions, Raul Prebisch had been using the concept as early as 1929 to describe the dichotomies between the “economically developed centre and the underdeveloped periphery,” while Friedmann had sought to improvise the theory to explain the unequal development of urban and rural areas. Accordingly, an amalgam of the Liberal Democratic and Centre-Periphery Models is necessary to understand the politicization of democracy within the context of the globalization agenda, as well as the phenomenon of coups and countercoups in Africa,

which often occur at the behest or with the collaboration of metropolitan finance and industrial capital.

Methodology

This paper adopted the secondary method of data collection and qualitative method of data analysis which is best suited given its historical-comparative approach at examining and analyzing collated data from journals, books and other documents of interest, to make sense out of emerging patterns. Content analysis was adopted as critical part of this methodology particularly in terms of its relevance in enabling the researcher to understand the general trends and perspectives in extant literature, as far as the polemics of democracy versus other forms of government is concerned.

Contending Issues

The Western imposition of democracy as the best form of government appears to have elicited considerable advocacy for the adoption of the concept by world governments. According to Wike et al. (2017), “a global median of 66% say direct democracy ... would be a good way to govern.” However, in Africa, democracy seems to have become counterproductive to development raising doubts about the capacity of the concept to change the African condition. All over the continent, hope appears to have dimmed on democracy as a development agent; hence, the necessity to review other options. There are reasons for this *volte-face*. First, there are observations that a foreign concept like Western democracy may become hamstrung in trying to arrest Africa’s underdevelopment. According to Angalapu (2023), democracy is incapable of addressing Africa’s governance problems because it is a foreign idea. Second, democracy in Africa since the era of decolonization appears to have only bestowed underdevelopment on the continent. Incidentally, the faulty political structures bequeathed to the African bourgeoisie by the retreating colonialists at flag independence ensured that the basic tenets of democracy were adhered to in breach. Free and fair elections which constitute a major plank of the democratic project hardly occurred in Africa. All over the continent, evidences abound where “democratically elected” heads of states and governments were alleged to have rigged themselves into power during elections, with attendant implications for peace and security in their various political conjunctures. For instance, Alade (2023) highlights what he considers as the five most rigged elections in Africa. The Liberian presidential election of 1927 was so massively rigged that it made the Guinness Book of Records as the most fraudulent election ever reported in history. In the election, the incumbent President Charles King claimed to have won the presidency with 240,000 votes while his opponent Thomas Faulkner only garnered 9,000 votes. However, the number of registered voters in the election was less than 15,000. Similarly, the Zimbabwe elections of 2008 saw incumbent President Robert Mugabe pitched against opposition

leader Morgan Tsvangirai. The results of the election were not announced for more than a month. When they were finally announced, Mugabe was acclaimed to have polled 43.2 per cent of the votes while Tsvangirai polled 47.9 per cent leading to a run-off under Zimbabwean law. In the build-up to the runoff, so much violence was wrought on the system forcing Tsvangirai to withdraw his ambition. Mugabe was then declared winner. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the 2011 presidential election between incumbent President Joseph Kabila and Etienne Tshisekedi was riddled with so much irregularity that Tshisekedi had to prematurely declare himself President as a countermeasure. It was alleged that over 5 million ballot papers had been earlier ticked for Kabila who “won” the presidency with 4.9 million votes. Furthermore, the Kenyan presidential elections of 2007 between President Mwai Kibaki, Raila Odinga of the opposition Orange Democratic Movement and Kalonzo Musyoka dangerously degenerated into ethnic violence. In the end, allegations that Kibaki had rigged the elections resulted in more violent clashes in which over 1000 people died with about 600,000 displaced. The Ugandan presidential elections of 2016 were not better. Kizza Besigye who was opposing incumbent President Yoweri Museveni was arrested many times before and after the elections while his Party headquarters was also raided by Ugandan police. Despite negative reports by the European Union and Commonwealth observers who were monitoring the elections, Museveni was declared winner with 52 per cent of total votes. In virtually all of these instances, there was widespread violence which for most of the time resulted in avoidable deaths and human suffering. The issue of election rigging in Africa is only a part of the general problem of democratic rule on the Continent. There is a related issue of “sit-tight syndrome” of African leaders who strive to perpetuate themselves in power either through legal acrobatics resulting in constitutional amendments to guarantee more terms, rigging or outright refusal to vacate the seat of power when defeated in elections; as was the case of Gambia’s Yahya Jammeh who upon his defeat by Adama Barrow, refused to relinquish power until he was forced out by a snap military intervention organized under the aegis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Apart from power and succession issues orchestrated by flawed elections, democracy also performed badly in the areas of providing sustainable development, alleviating poverty and maintaining basic human rights.

A Critique of Democratic and Military Rule in Africa

Given the paper’s comparative nature, a critique of democratic and military dispensations in Africa is necessary to set the tone for the discussions, given the perception of military rule as the foremost antithesis to democracy in Africa (Aka, 1999). For a start, one of the most prominent arguments usually encountered in the polemics of democracy and military rule is the notion that social discipline, which is essential for development, thrives better in military regimes. Accordingly, scholars

generally agree that military regimes are more inclined to enforcing social discipline among citizens given the very nature of a soldier's training. As (Obasi, 2023) asserts, "... the collapse of military discipline is the collapse of the military." Thus, in championing the argument on social discipline, Associate Professor and Director of the Abuja School of Social and Political Thoughts, Sam Amadi, while analysing trending issues in the West African sub-region on Arise News' Newsnight of 24th September, 2023 attributed part of the reasons for deteriorating democracy in Nigeria to "value debasement" which was rarely tolerated during military regimes. To buttress this point, Amadi drew a comparison between labour unions operating under military regimes and those operating under democratic dispensations and concluded that labour unions under military regimes appeared to be more disciplined and cohesive when compared to their compatriots under democratic regimes, in such a manner that seemed to portray social discipline as a basic requirement for the onerous task of labour's opposition to military regimes. The analysis by Dr Sam Amadi introduces the well-known evidence that military dictatorships – either in Africa or beyond - were often at the forefront of implementing discipline-instilling policies in their various jurisdictions. In Nigeria, the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) programme of the Buhari-Idiagbon junta of the early 80s was an attempt to restore orderliness in the ordinary ways of doing things albeit that the policy was criticized for its highhandedness and ruthlessness. In Ghana, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings' Operation "CLEAN UP" went a long way to address indiscipline and corruption in the West African country, and even in General Pervez Musharraf's Pakistan, there was the "Accountability and National Reconciliation Ordinance" which attacked corruption and indiscipline particularly in public institutions. These are in contrast to the anti-indiscipline policies of democratic regimes which mostly suffice in the creation of anticorruption agencies which are often deployed more in hounding political opposition. Furthermore, the question as to whether democracy has improved Africa's welfare in terms of speedy and sustainable development remains crucial. According to Aikins (2022), "Democracy alone is no guarantee for development." The writer further observes that:

almost three decades after the third wave of democratization, it's not clear that the development dividend has been attained. Despite Africa's vast natural resources, it remains the world's poorest region. Persistently high public debt and corruption, coupled with unemployment, income inequality and poverty remain endemic (Aikins, 2022).

Similarly, Edigheji (2020), asserts that Nigeria witnessed numerous institutional and developmental challenges despite the presence of liberal democracy and "good governance reforms." The challenges are attributed mainly to "under-investment in health, education and infrastructure," to the point that by 2020, the country had descended to a worryingly low human development category of 0.539 in its Human Development Index. Notwithstanding, a more practical democracy versus military rule

polemics would suffice in examining certain areas of the African polity. One of these areas is the observation of human rights in Africa. Under democracy in Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, South Africa to mention a few countries in Africa, human rights violations have occurred in very scary dimensions. These include the witch-hunting and brutal crackdown of opposition political figures, journalists, government critics etc. For instance, according to a press statement by the International Press Institute (IPI), for more than one year after the murder of Cameroonian journalist Martinez Zogo, authorities were yet to conclude investigations on the matter. Incidentally, Leopold Maxim Eko Eko, one of the suspects arrested on account of the murder is alleged to be the Director of the State's external intelligence service who alongside a certain Amougou Belinga was reportedly charged in March 2023 for torturing Mr Zogo, fuelling allegations of playing a critical role in the journalist's death. During the same period – precisely less than two weeks after Mr Zogo's murder, Jean Jacques Ola Bebe, another outspoken journalist was also killed while authorities dilly-dallied to make official pronouncements regarding the murder. Additionally, Opara (2023) reports that in 2023 alone, not less than 39 journalists were harassed in Nigeria by state and non-state actors and about half of these harassments occurred during the 2023 general elections. These were the very sins that military regimes were often accused of, but which are now occurring under the watch of democracy. In the area of security, democracy has been fingered in the escalation of insecurity in Africa. According to the African Centre for Strategic Studies, conflicts and insecurity in Africa arise out of the inability to resolve power sharing issues, ensure an all-inclusive participatory democracy, strengthen checks on the abuse of political power, as well as carry out smooth political successions. Another issue closely related to the foregoing is that participatory democracy in Africa appears to be facing severe limitations given that under democracy, many African countries have transited from one-party to dominant-party statehood.

Table 1: Current Dominant-Party States in Africa

Country	Political Party	Date of Establishment	Date of Ascension to Power
Republic of the Congo (Congo-Brazzaville)	Congolese Party of Labour (PCT)	1969	1969
Angola	Peoples' Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)	1956	1975
Equatorial Guinea	Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea	1987	1988
Mozambique	Liberation Front of Mozambique (FLM) or (FRELIMO)	1962	1977
Rwanda	Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)	1987	1994
Eritrea	Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice	1970	1991

	(PFDJ)		
Tanzania	Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)	1977	1961
South Africa	African National Congress (ANC)	1994	1912

* Eritrea is still a one-party state and its sole political party (PFDJ) was founded as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front but the Party's name was changed in 1994.

* The CCM in Tanzania was formed by a merger between the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) which had been the sole operating parties before 1977.

* The ANC in South Africa was founded in 1912 but was only legalized in 1990.

Source: Author's compilation with adaptation from Aikins (2023).

In essence, it would be most unfair to say that there were no progressive democratic governments in Africa like those of Dr. Francis Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Kambarage Nyerere and John Joseph Pombe Magufuli both of Tanzania, Nelson Mandela of South Africa or even Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria. However, we make the point that if democratic governments were considered progressive even with the state of democracy in Africa, then, military rule is as much progressive if not more. In the area of human rights, military regimes in Nigeria are often accused of excessive brutality and intolerance to opposition leading to tortures, massacres and politically-motivated murders alleged to be state-sponsored. Specifically, the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha have been constantly "questioned" about who killed Dele Giwa, Pa Alfred Rewane, Kudirat Abiola, "Bashorun" Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, and others. Interestingly, the democratic regime of Olusegun Obasanjo also needs to account for Bola Ige, Odunayo Olagbaju, Marshall Harry, Funsho Williams, Emily Omope, Ajibola Olanipekun, and so many others. Additionally, the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua regime also did not account for Charles Nsiegbe, Otunba Dipo Dina, Abayomi Ogundeji and Bayo Ohu.

Regarding the issue of corruption, the argument is often made that the Sani Abacha military regime is the most corrupt ever (Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project [SERAP], 2024) - specifically the fourth most corrupt in the world (Jolayemi and Ohia, 2004). Usually supporting the argument is the joke that the late General "recharges" Nigeria any time Nigeria is broke. The allegation is also often quickly made about how the Ibrahim Babangida regime misappropriated US\$12.4 billion Gulf War oil windfall. Yet, those who make these allegations conveniently fail to seek to know what happened to the US\$16 billion and US\$800 million purportedly spent on power production/distribution and refineries rehabilitation respectively, by the Obasanjo democratic regime with nothing to show, or the ₦881 billion said to be missing in 367 MDAs, and the ₦3.1 billion alleged missing in the Ministry of Finance between 2018 and 2019, or the alleged missing oil revenues amounting to US\$15

billion and ₦200 billion purportedly budgeted for repairs of refineries between 2020 and 2021, or the US\$2.1 billion and ₦3.1 trillion subsidy payments alleged missing between 2016 and 2019, or the ₦106 billion alleged missing in 149 MDAs in 2018, or the ₦37 billion alleged to be missing in the Hajiya Sadiya Umar Farouk-led Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development and an additional \$467 million which the former Minister was recently ordered by a Lagos High Court to account for, all of which fall under the Muhammadu Buhari democratic dispensation of 2015-2023. The same regime also takes credit for parading what may go down in history as the most corrupt Accountant General in Nigeria, who is accused of fraudulently converting a record ₦109 billion for personal use while in office. Equally worthy of mention is the appalling ingenuity which the democrats and their bureaucrats have now brought to the arena of corruption. Under the Muhammadu Buhari democratic dispensation, Nigerians suddenly woke up to the rude reality in which snakes and monkeys had become partners in corruption, swallowing monies that could turn around the fortunes of entire communities. In one shameful incident, a “distinguished” senator alleged that monkeys stole ₦70 million from a farmhouse (Busari, 2018). In another incident, a certain snake was alleged to have sneaked into an office at the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and swallowed ₦36 million (Ameh, 2018). In both incidents, nobody killed the snake or the monkey, including those who claimed to have seen them swallow the funds. This is in addition to other funny stories about termites eating up payment vouchers. The fact that General Buhari’s democratic regime was bogged down by an unrelenting avalanche of corruption scandals even when his military dictatorship of 1983-85 never recorded any suggests that there is something fundamentally wrong with democracy as a form of government, especially with the way it is practiced in Africa.

In the area of brazen impunity, it is worthy of mention that despite the reputation for arbitrariness often associated with military regimes, it was during a democratic dispensation that a serving state governor was kidnapped in Nigeria. More so, the country’s history of police brutality appeared to reach its apogee under the Muhammadu Buhari democratic dispensation leading to the famous End SARS protests.

Democracy and Development in Africa

On the question of development, (Terhemba, 2023) argues that democracy has failed in Nigeria; hence, the need for the Country to try other forms of government. However, in the comparison of democracy and military rule, the latter appears to have received much of the blame for Africa’s underdevelopment. It appears that colonialism and military rule are often the two culprits considered responsible for Africa’s underdevelopment; yet, hardly do malfeasant democratic regimes gain any

mention. Interestingly, one argument often projected in favour of military regimes in Nigeria is that much of the major infrastructures in the country were built by military regimes. In a report in the Sun Newspaper of 21st September, 2020, David Onwuchekwa cites Iyke Uzoukwu, founder of the Soul Revival Ministry, Okpunegbu, Anambra State, as stating that military regimes have performed better than democratic governments in Nigeria. The cleric insisted that:

No civilian dispensation has broken the record of military achievements in this country. It was the military that constructed almost 99 per cent of all the capital projects we have in this country. The military constructed the national theatre, Iganmu, Lagos; defunct NITEL; NEPA; Federal Palace Hotel; NICO-NUGA (sic) Hotel; Nigerian Ports Authority; all the military and police barracks in Nigeria; bridges in many parts of the country; highways; local and international airports, among others...But today what have the civilian administrations achieved? Nothing, absolutely nothing. They have achieved bad roads, insecurity and high cost of living. Look at our prisons (now baptized correctional centres) which are nothing to write home about. When you go to Europe to see their prisons, they are better than three-star hotels in this country. Our prisons are an eyesore; (Onwuchekwa, 2020).

The cleric's claims may have been exaggerated, but they are not far from the truth. For example, it took the military regimes of Generals Murtala and Obasanjo to complete the Abuja city commenced by the Shagari democratic dispensation in 1979. The Aso Rock Villa which is the Nigerian seat of power was conceived by the military regime of General Murtala Mohammed and executed by General Ibrahim Babangida's Armed Forces Ruling Council within 13 months. This is in contrast to the situation in Ivory Coast where the former Chairman of the Ghana Peoples' National Convention Bernard Mornah alleges in an interview that the democratic regime of Alassane Quattara still pays rent to France for use of the Country's presidential palace and seat of power. In Libya, the achievements of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi as military dictator remain unparalleled in the history of that country. Gaddafi's "Great Manmade River" project brought water to all regions of the desert country. Under Gaddafi, electricity and healthcare were free in Libya. Government provided land, livestock, seeds and even a farmhouse free of charge for any citizen interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. According to the Borgen Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting extreme poverty, education under Gaddafi was free and compulsory. Thus, during the Gaddafi era, national literacy increased from 25-87%. It is a well-known fact that Colonel Gaddafi gave a \$5000 bursary to every woman delivered of a baby in Libya to enable her cater for herself and her child, and despite the global fluctuation of oil prices in the world market during much of the period, the price of petrol in Libya remained the lowest in the world. Additionally, Gaddafi gave a \$50,000 bursary to all newly-weds and made sure that no interests were attached to loans. The Gaddafi regime subsidized the price of cars by 50% and ensured that Libya incurred no external debt under its watch. It is

instructive to note that the Libyan Gross domestic Product (GDP) per capita was highest under the Gaddafi era at \$15,000 while total reserves as at the end of his reign amounted to \$150 billion. Medical services were free, and where existing medical facilities in Libya could not cater for a particular ailment, the patient was sponsored by the Gaddafi government to receive treatment abroad. While there, such a patient received \$2,300 per month. Furthermore, the Gaddafi regime instituted an unemployment fee for all unemployed graduates in Libya while his policies also guaranteed food security for all Libyans (Owusu-Gyamfi, 2011). In the area of economic growth, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) observes that the Libyan economy grew at a rate of 10.3% in 2010, which was just a year before Gaddafi was assassinated. Most importantly, Gaddafi's idea of the gold-backed Dinar as common currency for the African continent rattled the West and was viewed in many quarters as having the capacity to liberate the continent from the stranglehold of "globalization," ushering it into an era of economic significance – if not supremacy - on the world scene. Gaddafi's Revolutionary Command Council also made frantic efforts to liberate Libya from the shackles of flag independence by removing British and American bases from the country, as well as repatriating Italian settlers. These giant strides have hardly been accomplished by any single democratic regime anywhere on the Continent.

In Egypt, Colonel Nasser had abolished the anachronistic and non-productive monarchy of King Farouk in 1952, and in 1954, after deposing the ineffective General Naguib whom he had handed over the reins of government after the 1952 revolution, went on to usher in an era of unprecedented reforms and achievements. Colonel Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal against the chagrin of Western interests, and embarked on ambitious projects like the construction of the Aswan High Dam and Helwan City. Nasser also created a 550 km long manmade lake which was named after him. The Colonel is also credited with the rise of Egypt's middle class and is known to have given more rights to women. In terms of democracy and development, evidence shows that military regimes have sometimes made more impact to the advancement of democracy in Africa than military rule.

On the suitability of democracy for Africa, Bassey and Udoudom (2018) insist that "democracy is not ideal for Africa." Clearly, Western-styled democracy may not cause African development because many of its attributes portend liabilities that could worsen the African condition. For instance, the free-market economy could stifle local industries and predispose the postcolonial African state to becoming a dumping ground for all manner of Western goods. "Representative democracy" could mean that not all the people would give their consent to government all the time – which is the same situation obtainable in military regimes, while the emphasis on periodic elections could fixate the political leadership on the goal of retaining power rather

than using such power for the benefit of the masses. Additionally, supremacy of the rule of law is not without challenges because many of the African countries are characterized by social inequality; so that the higher the inequality, the more absurd it becomes for some privileged members of society to subject themselves to the same laws with “commoners” and so on.

The next plank of the discussion suggests that more than anything else, the indiscretions of democratic administrations constitute the most attractive invitation to military rule. These indiscretions could be in the form of governmental highhandedness or insensitivity to the plight of the citizens, brazen and unbridled corruption, lack of development-based governance, poor management of post-election crises or even a direct invitation to the military to take over power as seen in Nigeria’s First Republic. Incidentally, many of the ills outlined in Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu’s speech heralding Nigeria’s first military coup in 1966 are still relevant till date. There are still 10 percenters on the corridors of power, political profiteers and swindlers still exist while nepotism and ethnic “divide and rule” are still alive and well. Democratic regimes in all their puritanism often failed to solve these problems, setting the stage for military interventions. Interestingly, when the coup speeches of successive military regimes in Nigeria are compared, they are seen to have largely followed the lines of Nzeogwu’s grievances. Furthermore, a closer look at the stated grievances of coup plotters in the African countries where coups have recently occurred shows a similarity in frustration about the incompetence of many democratically elected governments to revamp the economy, tackle fundamentalist insurgencies, properly equip the security agencies and deliver good governance to the people.

Democracy and the Gale of Contradictions

On the question as to whether democracy qualifies as the global best form of government, this paper maintains the view that the notion is riddled with contradictions. Drawing from the foundations laid in Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 3 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination opines that the right to self-determination includes “the rights of all peoples to pursue freely their economic, social and cultural development without outside interference.” Thus, this paper believes that the pursuance of “social development” without “outside interference” suggests the freedom of any country either in Africa or elsewhere to determine and practice the best form of government that best suits it without attracting any opprobrium from outside. If this is the case, it would then amount to external interference from this “outside” if it insists that the best

form of government for itself, could be extrapolated to become the best form of government for others even when the socio-political and economic peculiarities of the various jurisdictions are varied. Accordingly, the paper submits that it amounts to not just interference but international bullying when the West insists that democracy must become the best form of government for the rest of the world regardless of the political, existential and ideological idiosyncrasies of world nations. Additionally, there is no guarantee that a beneficial form of government at a certain level of development of the productive forces would remain so if revolutionary transformations occurred.

What is more, many of the countries pushing for the global adoption of democracy as the best form of government are not purely democratic. In fact, the West has never been really democratic (Kardum, 2023). Despite the hullabaloo about democracy, the United Kingdom remains a constitutional monarchy while the US is accused of receding into “illiberalism” given the administration of the Republican Party during the Trump era (Cole, 2021). Additionally, the US Electoral College system has been criticised for limiting participatory democracy and raising questions about the depth of democracy in the “heart” of democracy. Invariably, one wonders why the UK has not completely discarded the element of monarchy if democracy has been as wonderful as promoted. If democracy was wonderful, why did Aristotle prefer aristocracy? Why did Plato consider it dangerous, corrupt and unjust? Was it by accident that Socrates became critical about democracy as a form of government which could inhibit the learned and educated from ruling society given its allowance for demagoguery, where an eloquent politician could influence the citizens to vote in an irrational way?

China under “Chairman” Mao was not a democracy but Mao’s socialism transformed China (Lu, 2017). Similarly, no one can divorce Russia’s greatness from the Bolshevik revolution which established the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and entrenched socialism. France under Louis XIV was an absolute monarchy when it attained its *La Belle Epoque* or beautiful era, which was the French golden era. England and France as the great monarchies of medieval Europe testify eloquently to the fact that even monarchical absolutism (or its constitutional variant) possessed the ability to propel countries to greatness. Accordingly, this paper maintains that if socialism, fascism and monarchical absolutism could prosper countries, then, the aversion for military rule is uncalled for, especially in Africa where military regimes have provided the best alternative to democracy and other forms of government. Part of the reasons for adopting this view is that in international relations, the metropolitan manipulators of the peripheral post-colonial African state and their allies do not really care about the official appearance of the African petit bourgeoisie - the indigenous supervisors of the neo-colonial project who masquerade as heads of states and governments. They can wear “khaki” or “agbada.” All that

matters to the former colonizer and his allies is that the former structures of colonial appropriation and accumulation in the former colonies remain undisturbed and undisrupted in the neo-colonial era. In this instance, the Centre of the Centre may perceive military rulers as an armed faction of the African petit-bourgeoisie who, as the new arrowheads of the centre of the periphery, must fully align with metropolitan interests in return for regime protection, survival and longevity. A departure from this norm would most likely result in countercoups, hurried elections and handovers to more pliable administrations or in the worst case scenario, be awarded an international pariah status with attendant debilitating sanctions. Notwithstanding, it is instructive that while Colonels Nasser and Gaddafi were overthrowing unproductive monarchies in Africa, monarchies, fascisms and other forms of government were transforming nations in Europe. Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, Great Britain, Spain, Sweden, Portugal, Norway and Russia were all at the very least, constitutional monarchies when they undertook to partition Africa among themselves in 1884 - 1885. Rome was a monarchy at the height of its power. The Vatican City which is an independent enclave within Italy was a monarchical theocracy when Pope Urban II launched the crusades in 1095 and reclaimed Jerusalem four years later. Macedonia was not a democracy when it transited from a small kingdom in northern Greece to a conquering empire. Mongolia attained the heights of glory as a monarchy. Fascism as National Socialism (NAZI) in Germany and National Fascism in Italy brought out the best in both countries in the 20th Century. The point being made is that there is no form of government that is not prone to failure; and there is no form of government that is not capable of development. Therefore, the forms of government are not sufficient in themselves to guarantee a country's greatness. It is the degree of their compatibility to the peoples' yearnings that would make the difference.

Conclusion

We examined the concept of Democracy in relation to the resurgence of military coups in Africa and questioned the validity of Western imposition of the concept as the world's best form of government. Juxtaposing the activities of military and democratic regimes in Africa and elsewhere, we deployed copious examples to show that long years of democracy did not develop Africa, but only reproduced underdevelopment. Additionally, we noted that the worldwide aversion for military rule is uncalled for, given the evidence that all known evils associated with military rule appear more prevalent in democracies. Having identified military rule as the foremost antithesis and alternative to democracy in Africa, we noted that all forms of government had inbuilt capacities to positively transform societies, except that where some had failed, others had succeeded due to the degree of their compatibility with the objective conditions of the concerned jurisdictions. Accordingly, we maintained that the notion of democracy as the global best form of government has not been

empirically satisfied; and concluded that the best form of government for Africa is that which arises out of her sociological experience and censorship to address critical aspects of her political economy; especially her crisis of underdevelopment.

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