

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



*Scroll down to read the article.*

## THEORIES AND MOTIVES OF MILITARY COUPS D'ETAT IN INDEPENDENT AFRICAN STATES

By Eze Ogueri II

MILITARY rule has become a constant feature of contemporary-African politics and administration. There is hardly an independent African state which is not either under military rule, under civilian/military rule threatened with real or obsessed by rumours of suspected military takeover. The above statement should not be misunderstood to mean that all African states are under military rule. One of the difficulties confronting writers on military rule in Africa is that the military elite in contemporary African politics are taciturn with regard to management of coups. Apart from their radio/television and newspaper pronouncements real facts and figures are lacking; quantification of analysis thus becomes a serious handicap. Their unwillingness to supply data is understandable.

The pains of ordering stable societies based on stated democratic political philosophy of the new westernized elite stumble against the hard facts of under-development and corruption compounded with resistance by traditionalist elites. Inevitably, the delicate political balance maintained between traditional forces and agencies of modernization snaps under dysfunctional pressure, thus necessitating military presence.

The whole phenomena would be better understood within the historical context of African nationalism and nationalist movements. Analytically, African nationalism manifests itself in literal definition, language and level of operation; furthermore, it is attributed to reason of insecurity; need for nation state, traditional nationalism and nationalistic universalism.<sup>1</sup> Because independence is the totality of nationalist aspirations, it is also an historic necessity and the logical proof of the existence of the state.

Two problems emerge from independence. They are: first, the problem of sharing of loaves and fishes of offices; secondly, the problem of defining (a) who among the population are dedicated nationalists, fence-sitters; 'Uncle Toms', etc., (b) who are capitalists, bourgeoisie, workers, peasants. The debate on these problems culminate in the search for bases of legitimacy as well as the right ideology: democracy, socialism, equality, legality, etc. at least in theory. Maquet confirms that both civilian and military regimes employ identical ideologies to legitimise power:<sup>2</sup>

- (i) The withering of opposition political party/parties and ascendance of dominant party or coalition of parties.
- (ii) The top echelon of military formation is "pocketed", thus postponing, for a while, the possibility of intervention.
- (iii) Institutional political intransigence leads finally to coup d'etat.

The accumulated grievances of military personnel leading to takeover of civilian government either by invitation or by direct intervention may be explained in terms of theories or motives.

---

\* Senior Lecturer Department of Political Science, University of Nigeria Nsukka.

2. Jacques Maquet : *Power & Society in Africa* (trans. from the French by Jeanette Kupfermann) (New York : McGraw Hill Book Co. 1971)

The rhetoric of the presidents who have seized power by force invokes either the restoration of order in a situation of political and economic anarchy, or the revolution to establish a new social order which will be just, fraternal and socialist. This is no more than rhetoric for there are few African regimes that do not claim to be socialist (whatever in fact are their basic political and economic choices) and few *coups d'état* that do not pretend to be revolutionary (even when it is only a question of the victory, often ephemeral, of a ruling faction seeking to occupy the summit of the hierarchy).

The polyarchal elites who operate with the handicaps of a divided minority belonging to rival political parties find it difficult to extricate themselves from the original proposition. It is that capitalists and workers, the rich and poor, abound in African society, as elsewhere; that winners of independence belong to either the one or another group; that the suffering common man is real and also that the new rulers must ameliorate his condition.

In spite of fine blue-prints for modernisation, the developmental capability gap narrows to the extent that the credibility gap widens. Amidst the welter of criticisms directed mainly against political elites because of their alleged personalisation and sacralization of authority,<sup>3</sup> and especially their conspicuous consumptive life-style,<sup>4</sup> the national leader gropes for a solution to accumulated social ills. Professor Lewis describes it thus:

"The prestige is incredible. Men who claim to be democrats in fact behave like emperors. Personifying the state, they dress themselves in uniforms, build themselves palaces, bring all other traffic to a standstill when they drive, hold fancy parades and generally demand to be treated like Egyptian pharaohs".

To remain in power the elites must either forcibly weld the nation and its people together—a course which is uncommon to multi-party African political experience—or compromise with the known evil triad of traditionalism, tribalism and regionalism, which encourage multi-party political systems.<sup>5</sup>

Among the tribulations of civilian political authorities, is the failure of their ideological statements to explain poor authoritative outputs. Increased stresses on the system result in its breakdown. Three apparent stages emerge:

1. For references to these and other factors, see:

- i. Edwin R. A. Seligman: *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 11 (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1954) p. 231
- ii. Thomas Hodgkin: *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd. 1968) 6th impression, pp. 14-24.
- iii. Hans Morgenthau: *Politics Among Nations*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966) pp. 102, 155, 322, 323-325.

- 
3. Ali A. Mazrui: "The Monarchical Tendency in African Pol. Culture in Marion Doro & Newell Stultz ed. *Governing in Black Africa*.
  4. Arthur W. Lewis: "Beyond African Dictatorship: The Crises of the One Party State" reprinted in Doro: *Op. cit.* p. 84, 90.
  5. William Hanna: *Independent Black Africa*; (Rand & Co. 1964) p. 363-9.

- iv. Rupert Emerson: *From Empire to Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1960) pp. 239-253 "The Colonial Nationalist as
- v. Carlton J. H. Hayes: *Nationalism: A Religion* (New York: The MacMillan Co. 1960) pp. 160-163, Nationalism and tribalism in Africa. a Democrat"
- vi. Karl W. Deutsch: *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: Technology Press N.I.T. & John Wiley & Sons Inc. 1953) pp. 3-14. "Some views of nationalism and nationality".
- vii. Leonard W. Doob: *Patriotism and Nationalism* (New Haven: Yale U. Press 1964) pp. 181-197.

The current revolutionary movements in Africa, which run parallel to African nationalism and nationalist movements, have been headed and organised by a microscopic minority, some members of which have personally firm commitments to the democratic process. "Only three" made the Great October Revolution of 1917 in the Soviet Union. French, African, Cuban Asian, Egyptian and Chinese experiences bear the same striking resemblance in the fewness of ideological theorists who master-minded *coups d'état* and revolutions.<sup>6</sup> *Coups d'état*, therefore, are invariably managed by the most embittered members of the disaffected and disgruntled class. People who are satisfied with a political system have no reason to stage a coup; on the contrary it is those who are so unhappy and dissatisfied as to wish to make the supreme sacrifice in order to save the nation and its people. Besides, the end of successive military governments is either syncretistic or civilian rule. In order, however, to give a stamp of legality to whatever form of government emerges after the revolution, a larger group is invited to join the ranks of the government. This group in turn opts for a larger and more democratic body.

An army coup may conveniently be described in the modern African context as the highest (not necessarily extreme) stage of African nationalism and nationalist movement, for in terms of violence nothing else can be higher. Major Nzeogwu, a star-figure in the January 15, 1966 coup in Nigeria, stated on January 17:

"We wanted to change the government for the benefit of everybody also. We were concerned with what was best for Nigeria".<sup>7</sup> Lt-Colonel Hassan Katsina's sentiments were related to national pride. As Military Governor of the North, he declared to the *Daily Times* (Lagos) on October 4, 1966, after the second coup as follows:

---

6. Fidel Castro: "The Road to Revolution in Latin America" excerpts from a speech delivered by him on July 26, 1963 and printed in *The Ideologies of Developing Nations*, pp. 330-335.

Egypt — The late Gamal Abdel Nasser, President of the UAR, personified "the most embittered inner group that made the Egyptian Revolution against Pharaoh Farouk, son of Sultan Faud. See the Philosophy of the Revolution (Cairo: Information Dept. 1954).

USSR—The three who made the October Revolution of 1917 were V. I. Lenin, J.V. Stalin & Leon Trotsky (History of Russian Rev.)

7. Luckham: *Op. cit.* p. 31; see also Doro: p. 286. Cf. Claude E. Welch: "Soldier and State in Africa" in Doro Stultz: *Governing in Black Africa*, p. 170.

"From the international point of view, I would personally like to see a strong and virile centre. For only by such an arrangement can we as a nation continue to make an appreciable impact on the world scene".

Military rule is an inevitable alternative to civilian government by politicians who have failed the nation. We now turn to the major causes of military interventions. According to Welch, the overriding reason advanced by the military to seize control is the "unique duty to protect national interest"—nationalism.

### **Military Rule:**

Military takeover of civilian government could conceivably be, but is hardly ever, an exclusive affair of members of the armed forces. On closer examination, though, one discovers that political entrepreneurs from within and outside the very government might directly or indirectly be involved. Members of the armed forces strike as a final measure. The civilian members of the opposition whose party or parties had either been crushed, proscribed or withered away in the face of severe onslaught go underground. In a fully developed democratic system, responsible opposition could count on the vulnerability of its constructive criticisms to redress political imbalance. A constitutional government regards the opposition as a public watchdog rather than an enemy. It is not so with a corrupt government which, for lack of refreshing ideas, of mobilizing and incapable and integrating the people, must of necessity institute a witch-hunt.

Many a government of the new nations fit into the latter category and hardly appreciate the paradox that it is in the best interest of the government that a strong responsible and virile opposition should exist. The power-seekers "in conscious pursuit of their self-interest"<sup>8</sup> consider open ideas extremely dangerous.

Because an open party permits free traffic of ideas in the same way as in a multi party system and, because free traffic of ideas leads to open or private criticisms of a dictatorial, corrupt leadership and, therefore, constitutes an embarrassing opposition, it is inconceivable that such leadership would tolerate the existence of a strong responsible and virile opposition.

Members of the opposition partly tend to become disillusioned and disgruntled soon after they had gone out of power. The longer they stay out of office, the greater is their degree of irresponsibility in criticisms of government policy. Among civilian power seekers, are the "powerful elite" with limitless resources. As influential members of the political community, their contacts with agencies of socialisation and politicisation—pressure groups and armed forces, cannot be under-estimated. Members of the armed forces are seen by them, too, as powerful honest brokers. The non-military power seekers in the doldrums rejoice at such change. Analytically, the foregoing experience is typical of the Agraria type of typology of political systems.

In the olden days of limited unmechanized tribal warfare, it might not have been absolutely necessary to seek the aid of third parties in order to organise an insurrection. The mode of agricultural economy affected warfare.

---

8. Dahl : *Modern Political Analysis* (2nd ed.) (New Jersey) : Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliffs, 1970) pp. 86—88.

The forces of diminishing opposition, including leading members of the public, peddle their still lingering influences among members of the armed forces. Eventually, they establish contacts with existing political cells among the military. The political military consequently become increasingly "politicized". The role of the military in the circumstances is analogous to that of Hobbesian Leviathan, who is entrusted with the sovereign duty of maintaining law and order, hence army-led coup. Military takeover might be motivated by national interest but in traditionalistic political systems, a coup d'etat could end up in favour of certain groups, tribes or regions. Representatives of the "losing" side-group, tribe or region thereafter harbour political grievances, depending upon the "severity of the conflict".<sup>9</sup>

Military takeover is a dangerous undertaking. It is fraught with consequences. But for as long as chance of success exists, for so long will its initiators act as catalysts in any revolutionary programme. Experience shows that with a few exceptions (such as General Joseph Ankrah of Ghana, General Houari Boumedienne in Algeria, Lt.Colonel Sangoule Lamizana in Upper Volta) etc.<sup>10</sup> the revolutionaries who stage-manage coups tend to be drawn from the young elements and middle-grade officers of the armed forces. By "young" is meant young both in age and rank: from 2/Lts to Majors, at most Lt-Colonels. In this paper, people aged 40 and under are considered young.

Highly placed military officers who rose from the ranks in the former West African Frontier Force, the King's Rifles of East Africa, and the well-known French Legionnaires, lingered for years over one or two points of promotion. As a result, they tended to become old, conservative, even reactionary on attaining substantive ranks of Colonel, Brigadier and General.

In Nigeria, the three oldest (in order of enlistment) career senior combat officers who rose through the ranks, Lt-Col. W. U. Bassey (echoit 1944), Major-General J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi (1947) and Brigadier S. A. Ademulegun (1947), were considered loyal, conservative and incapable of initiating a coup d'etat.<sup>11</sup>

Exceptions to the above statement are from those African states which had experienced civil wars and which, in turn, necessitated rapid promotions in order to raise morale, compensate for the hard necessities of war, including loss of life and also ensure speedy replacement of such officers as were lost in the war theatres. Africanisation or indigenisation of the officer corps of the armed forces of African states rose sharply after independence.<sup>12</sup>

Example—Nigeria:

**Total Colonel and above in January 1966**

Total before the coup = 7

Total in May after the coup = 3

Total strength after civil war (1967-1970) has more than quadrupled with at least 1 General, 2 Majors General, Brigadiers, etc.

9. Dahl: *Op. cit.* pp. 55—56.

10. Cf: Lt-Colonel Gaddafi in Libya.

The five youthful Majors in Nigerian national crisis of January 1966.

11. Nigeria, Dahomey & Upper Volta provide good examples.

12. Luckham: *Op. cit.* pp. 56—58.

Total Brigadier and above strength as at Oct. 1, 1972 = 1 General, 2 Majors-General, 6 substantive Brigadiers, 6 temporary Brigadiers.

Military takeovers, in the new African nations, however, are hardly possible without the knowledge of the civilian population. The army might spear-head the exercise. This is not to say that cases do not abound where young, angry officers, unknown to their superior officers, hatched the overthrow and change of government.<sup>13</sup> The following military coups d'état which took place between 1960-66 in black Africa were principally led by youthful officers.

State	Coup d'état	Regular Pre-coup Armed Forces** (Excluding Police)	Leader/s
1. Congo (Zaire) Republic	Sept. 14, 1960	32,000	Col. Mobutu Sese Seko
2. Ethiopia	Dec. 13, 1960	35,000	General Newaye
3. Togo	Jan. 13, 1963	1,450	Nicholas Grunitsky—put in power by old & young army officers.
4. Dahomey	Oct. 28, 1963	1,000	Colonel Soglo
5. Gabon	Feb. 18, 1964	750	Jean Aubame (supported by a group of young officers in unsuccessful coup)
6. Central Afr. Republic	Jan. 1, 1966	600	Colonel Bokassa
7. Upper Volta	Jan. 4, 1966	1,500	Colonel Lamizana
8. Nigeria (a)	Jan. 15, 1966	11,500	"A group of young army officers" *
(b)	July 29, 1966		Army officers against centralisation
9. Ghana	Feb. 24, 1966	17,000	Major-Gen. Joseph A. Ankrah (supported mainly by young officers). Gen. Ankrah's role is like Gen. Neguib's in Egypt.
10. Burundi	Nov. 28, 1966	950	Civilian & Military.

With regard to statistics, whilst the exact present (1973) figures for the Nigeria regular armed forces cannot be quoted, it is believed to be about or

13. Evan Luard: *Conflict and Peace in the Modern International System* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1968) pp. 146—154.

\*\* Figures are extracted from David Word: *The armed Forces of African States* London, Institute for Strategic Studies, 1966; Adelphi Papers No. 27 pp. 28—9; See also Doro & Stultz, Op. cit. pp. 161—162.

\* See Luard above.

more than the figure for the rest of African states put together and may well run into hundreds of thousands. Except for Ethiopia which has ancient military tradition and career officer corps, the rest of the coup leaders are comparatively young. Their ideological direction is either against politicians, neutral, ethnic or politically theoretical.

Between 1966—1972, successful and unsuccessful *coups d'état* have either taken place or were reported in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Guinea, Egypt, Burundi, Zambia, Zanzibar, Tanzania, Congo Brazzaville, Libya, Malagassy, Mali, Morocco, Rwanda, Zaire, Togo, Upper Volta, etc. They were frontally if not primarily led by young army officers. One such dramatic and "bloodless" military takeover took place in Dahomey on Thursday 26, October, 1972, being also led by youthful Major Mathieu Kerekou, at the head of young army captains in their thirties.

No single motive can be ascribed to the military aspect of African nationalism which gathered momentum from the early days of public addresses at "freedom squares". Violent speeches frequently earned imprisonment terms for nationalist leaders. Imprisonment intensely aroused their followers. Consequently, nationalist agitation increased in tempo, from the innocuous village electioneering campaigns to the shattering post-independence phenomena of *coups d'état* and civil wars

There must exist more fundamental reasons for such a violent purge, than mere change of government. What motives actuate military rule in Africa? What are the primary causes of such bewildering adventures which sometimes leave government and people in hardly better condition than they originally found themselves. The outstanding reasons include:

1. Genuine Motives for change of Government
2. Rape of Constitution by civil political elites
3. Extravagance
4. Slow Development
5. Tribalism and Ethnocentrism
6. Foreign ideological contamination
7. Capitalist Vs. Socialist/Communist Economic Systems
8. The Contagion of Coups
9. Lust for Power and Glory
10. Unattractive Conditions of Service
11. Power Vacuum—Absence of Mil. Pacts, Exit of expatriate Mil. officers.
12. Traditionalistic extended African family life-style.
13. Divine Revelation (Inspiration) Theory.

I. Whatever might be the motives, open or concealed, of coup makers in contemporary Africa, the initial impression is that they are actuated by best intentions. The overthrow of a government usually follows as the culmination of accumulated wrongs and injustices. Any agency of change that steps forth to correct the social ills is welcome with open arms. The mutability of all political systems has been recognized since Plato; so also do the factors of change.

"... soldiers sometimes feel that they alone can rescue the nation from inefficiency, corruption, decadence or dependence". 14

---

14 Luard : *Ibid.* p. 146.



Reasons for seizure of power might even be "in order to avert an imminent civil war" as adduced by Major Mathieu Kerekou, on the occasion of military takeover in Dahomey in October 1972.\* Under the excitement of the moment, favourite songs are composed; effigies of overthrown leaders are burnt; street names are changed, and oftentimes national monuments are either pulled down or renamed. A new zest for life reminiscent of the initial birth of the nation is felt. But such changes of government, by the military, judging from the lessons of history, at best are political honey-moons; they hardly last. Whatever might be the case, it would be both improper and untimely to suspect the motives of the new rulers particularly when a military takeover is not overtly initiated by power-seekers.

Revolutionaries or permanent coup makers, particularly the military proceed on the assumption that the poor, their supporters, "are repelled by inequality of the rich and seek to destroy them".

Paradoxically, the excessive equality of a democracy might be cause for entrenched political elites to finance a *coup d'état* or even a revolution. 15

It matters little who restores political freedom and democratic process to the people: liberals, conservatives, socialists or capitalists, provided that "salvation" came with "tranquility"

II. Western powers partitioned Africa in the name of king and empire; in alleged defence of metropolitan constitutions, for the protection, security and prosperity of benighted African peoples. Such pious utterances were more or less embodied in independence constitutions of colonial states. In defence of constitution and love of country empires were built; precisely in the same defence of the Constitution and love of oppressed people, African nationalism provided a clear antidote to imperialism. Many leaders of emergent nations, once saddled in power, "forget", all too soon, the sanctity of the Constitution, as the highest law of the land. Genuine military take-overs and consequent rule in Africa, are motivated by a religious belief in righting accumulated wrongs.

The office of Head of State/Government evokes expressed consent to defend the Constitution of the land. The spirit of many such constitutions frankly is practically shoved aside. Regardless of due process of law citizens are deprived of their property. Freedom of assembly, press and religious worship; untrammelled people's freedom in the choice of their leaders equally dealt a severe blow. In this manner, the constitution raped, and such a stirring of political storm is grounds for violent change of government. The failure of the Nigerian constitution provides a classic example of its rape—over census (1962-63; 1964), revenue allocation, the presidency, entangling alliances, violence, rigged election returns and protracted crises culminating in military acceptance of invitation to rule. 16

III. Among the advertised grievances of nationalist and political theorists of the new nations is the abject poverty and squalor in which the people are steeped. Independence, therefore meant among other things, an effort to

---

\**Sunday Times*, Lagos, Oct. 29, 1972, p. 1,

15. Alfred de Grazia: *Political Behaviour*, Vol. 1 (New York: The Free Press, 1966 pp. 283-286.

16. John P. Mackintosh: *Nigerian Government and Politics* Lo Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1965) Chap. XIII "The Struggle for Power, 1964".

reduce the staggering inequality existing between expatriate and Africans on the one hand; and between African potentates and commoners on the other

Nationalists who represent forces of modernisation wrested the initiative from both traditional authorities and expatriates. They won independence for the people. Regretfully, within a few years of holding the reins of power, former under-privileged critics of stratified colonial political systems build for themselves financial empires and indulge in shameless extravagance unworthy even of persons who had amassed honest wealth.<sup>17</sup> The *nouveaux riches* constitute a clear danger. Their impudent pride hurts nationalist sensibilities. Exceptions, of course exist of men who were wealthy before they entered into politics, e.g. Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh of Nigeria, Felix Houphouet Boigny of Ivory Coast and Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal. Politics, however, did not impoverish them. The majority of this class of people rather became wealthier and better known. The "politics of poverty" as it is called, arises from non-recognition of feedback.

Worse still, a dangerous situation is created if, in addition to economic power they are also invested with "absolute" political power. It is the hopelessness of any thought of catching up with them that leads to intervention by the military. The "Robber Barons" of the United States of America enjoyed economic power, and perhaps a little bit more. Many leaders of the new states enjoy a totality of power: economic, political, financial and sometimes the additional religious sanction which gives power in the African context its theocratic stamp. Under the so-called "due process of law" and normal operation of the Constitution, it would be extremely difficult to remove such powerful incumbents from office, hence military intervention.

IV. The impoverished state of the new nations is used as an argument to fight the battle of independence. African elites who had, in addition to their education, travelled abroad, could not help but admire clear evidence of modernisation in relatively efficient political systems; good roads, modern buildings, social welfare services, fine educational institutions, high living standards, medical facilities and consequent longevity in countries of their sojourn. They invariably return with a sense of embarrassment and revolt at the continued backwardness of their people.

The sight of open gutters, ranshacks and cabins, bush schools, primitive farming habits, high mortality rates among infants and adults alike, epidemic and endemic diseases, bad roads, poor unbalanced dietary habits, general despair and unhappiness, revolted them the most. They are convinced that with freedom and knowledge of science and technology, they could combat under-development with which the political system was retarded by and "are inextricably linked with the concepts of imperialism and colonialism"<sup>18</sup> Such are the high expectations associated with nationalism and independence.

Notwithstanding the many delegations sent abroad for developmental pro-

---

17. Luard: *Ibid.* pp. 282-284.

It is remarkable that most senior officers in the Nigerian army by 1966 spoke strongly against corruption as an index of the ill-gotten wealth that was displayed with incredible extravagance. Army spokesmen then include Major Nzeogwu, Lt-Cols. Ojukwu and Katsina.

18. Kenneth W. Grundy: "African Explanations of Under-Development The Theoretical Basis for Political Action", *Doro: Op. cit.* pp. 251-260

grammes, and in spite of loans granted by developed states, loans which could have wrought economic miracles, provided they were sensibly utilized, the people's lot is scarcely better than before the grant of independence. The village farmer, petty trader, or humble artisan, quite removed from the nerves of government, whose monthly salary was twenty pounds before independence, had not improved much more than twenty-four pounds per annum, after 15 years of independence. This is by no means an extreme example. Some would be lucky if they were not steeped in debt. The result is continued under-development.

Slow development here implies under-development but not entirely of the population's making. With proper rationalisation of national economic and availability of capital, raised partly on loan, the common characteristics of under-developed countries could be adequately tackled. These include over population in agriculture, disguised employment, lack of capital, zero savings, high cost of living (food and necessities) lack of credit facilities, etc. 19

It is an open secret that much of the loans raised abroad are siphoned away into private accounts. Contracts are awarded to leaders' favourites and since the ordinary man appears helpless in the situation, it is apparent that only the intervention of military can restore public confidence. They, the military, at least for the moment, enjoy the confidence of moving fast enough with development projects. Unfulfilled demands and stresses upon the political system most possibly (though not probably) lead to output failure.<sup>20</sup>

V. Traditionalism, regionalism and tribalism are chief among the forces of demobilization in Africa. This is not to say that African societies have not profited from the many uses of tradition; the cultural and social welfare aspects of tribal organisation: the feeling of identity and the pulling together of human and material resources that are better organised on regional level. It, after all, was from such beginnings that modern African nationalist movements received impetus.<sup>21</sup>

From the onset, integrative movements concentrated on the small ethnic complexes, later to the large tribal organisations which in turn helped make many of the present leaders of Africa. Town Unions, age grade associations, philanthropic bodies, employment aid agencies and monthly contribution groups were in the past almost wholly organised on ethnic or trans-ethnic, tribal lines. The widow's mite contributed by these associations and unions, and particularly the town unions, made all the differences between success and failure in the life of many a potential leader.

In the first half of the 20th century, the education of a gifted young man from a poor family became the collective responsibility of the extended family: the village, town and clan. Rouch's "super-tribalisation" accounts for the heightened tribal feeling in urbanized communities far beyond the

19. Harry Leibenstein : *Economic Backwardness and Economic Growth* (New York : 1957) pp. 40-41.

20. David Easton : *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (New York : John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1965) pp. 58-60

21. St. Clair Drake : "Traditional Authority and Social Action in Former British W. Africa", reprinted in William J. Hanna : *Independent Black Africa* (Chicago : Rand McNally & Co., 1963) pp. 298-305. Traditionalism, regionalism and tribalism still have a staying power.

original concept of ethnicity in the village milieu. In this sense, "super-tribalisation" seems the opposite of "detrribalisation".<sup>22</sup> Even young men and women from well-to-do families still considered it part of their traditional duty to notify town unions of their plans for overseas studies. The receiver of gifts, in cash and kind, is advised to return with the "golden fleece"; and is morally obligated to make good for himself and the tribe. The successful beneficiary, especially from the educational point of view, is henceforth viewed as an elite an opinion leader in the African extended family system.<sup>23</sup>

On completion of his studies, such "favourite son" would depend on members of his ethnic group for initial patronage. Practising lawyers and medical officers, particularly those based in rural localities, expect clients largely drawn from among their own people. The future political leader casts his lot with members of his ethnic group. Votes in these traditionalistic societies are delivered on tribal lines. In the early days of nationalist movements, ethnic groups played dual roles. Mandates collected from "the chiefs elders and people" of the different villages, towns and clans, were possible because of the personal entreaties of important favourite sons. They paved the way for leaders of political parties to ingratiate themselves with the people of their particular areas and, of course, expected to be benefited by the success of independence movements. Ethnocentrism had not, as yet been viewed as an evil to the system.

With the grant of independence, leaders of thought of the different ethnic complexes, with their interests at heart, look forward to their share of the fruits of independence. Each local leader is anxious to satisfy his people through preferential treatment, out of gratitude for past kindness and in the hope that the backwardness of his fellow "tribesmen" would be ameliorated. In time, the simple obligations of securing jobs for the ill-equipped and unsuccessful members of the ethnic group develops in direct proportion to the position of prominence attained by the local elite in the government. The question is no longer one of securing ordinary jobs.

In these fiercely competitive societies, the demand escalates to fighting for board appointments, Directorship of statutory corporations, and representation in international organisations and specialised agencies. Here is where nepotism interweaves with tribalism. Because tribal associations in Nigeria, as Post has correctly pointed out, see "the individual and the community and the communities and the political system" as being inextricably interwoven.<sup>24</sup> Bottomore also makes the point that the tribal elite in time rises to a position of responsibility and becomes a member of the Establishment that

---

22. J. Wallerstein : "Ethnicity and National Integration in West Africa" in Doro *op. cit.*, pp. 10-12

23. Geraint Parry : *Political Elites* (London : George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1969) pp. 83-86; "Education and elite formation".

24. Ken W. J. Post : *The Nigerian Federal Election of 1959* (London : Oxford U. Press, for the Nigerian Institute of Social & Economic Research, 1963) pp. 370-399.

Cf. S. F. Nadel : *The Foundations of Social Anthropology* (London : Cohen & West, 1953) p. 146. The membership of a community of a tribe of a religious group, influences one's political action especially in Nigeria.

could provide appointments in the statutory corporations and agencies.<sup>25</sup>

If, as is often the case, political offices are few and can only be distributed on regional basis; and, if different political parties draw their main support also from different regions, then an identity of interests can be established between ethnic complexes and the party regional organisation. The resultant in-fighting based on ethnic lines is the bane of African politics. African "pattern variables" orientate the individual to collectivism rather than to individualism. Collectivism conceptualizes the individual as living within the group in an ascribed, charismatic political system where particularistic loyalty could goad the individual to such malpractices as nepotism, tribalism, even open corruption for the benefit of self and group.

How does this concern the military whose members are supposedly removed from active politics? The military might not be involved with political activities but its members cannot be blind to the political life of the nation. In the event of breakdown of law and order, their role of intervention could be the saving grace but then, they, too, would have become victims of traditionalism tribalism and regionalism. In such an event, military formation would never be the same. It would not be fully representative of component ethnic groups.

VI. The ascending theory of tribalism sees this development as arising from a mere extended rivalry for advantageous position through jockeying for power on clan level to regional identification of collective tribal interest with regional politics. On every level, there is a conflict. Two opposing political and economic forces are at work. A similar, though inappropriate analogy can be drawn in assessing the role of ideology in military takeovers in Africa.

Nationalist movements, heretofore, were climaxed by the granting of independence through constitutional negotiations.<sup>26</sup> In most cases, the newly independent nation states negotiated with the Western powers: Great Britain, France, Belgium, Spain and at the extreme end, Portugal. The ideologies of Western nations are more or less the same. The political systems are described as "liberal" democracies; their economic systems are capitalist in orientation, with modifications of socialism and mixed economy.

Democratic tendencies in the western ideology were employed as a formidable argument against undemocratic policies. It soon became a strong weapon in the hands of nationalists and nationalist movements in their drive for self-government and independence. "Cultural superiority and a humiliating, unhumanitarian condescension" as practised by people who

---

25. T. B. Bottomore : *Elites and Society* (Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, England, 1971) pp. 93-110; "Tradition and Modernity: Elites in the Developing Countries".

26. Evan Luard : *Op. cit.* pp. 122-126 — Causes of colonial disputes.

extolled the principles of unity, equality and fraternity conflicted with the spirit of African nationalism.<sup>27</sup>

The present phenomenon of military takeovers was practically unknown during the period of colonial administration. Military formation in pre-independence days was as tightly controlled as the civil service. Ideological struggles in the colonies were reduced to the barest minimum. Independence, however, carried with it freedom of organization, expression, assembly and religious worship, etc. Organisation and expression included the communications theory with distant lands and different political systems other than the West. Post-independence years ushered ideological cross-currents and knowledge of communism and socialism, at least in the context of Marxian interpretation of history. The doctrinaire socialist political system and the meaning of one party in a country awakened public interest in and the thought of giving the system a hearing. Anxiety sits upon human breast in analysing individual ideological preferences for "efficient but inhumane dictatorship and "inefficient" but human democracy.

The difficulties attendant upon independence were soon blamed on faulty ideology. Members of the political elite within the system shared divergent views on the subject. This no doubt, had an effect on the military officers, who were supposedly insulated from politics. There has been as yet no definitive study of the role of foreign oriented ideologies in military *coups d'état* in Africa. It is not inconceivable, however, that the attitude of officers and other ranks to such concepts as liberalism, radicalism, conservatism, totalitarianism, authoritarianism and traditionalism may have directly or indirectly influenced the behavioural approach of coup-makers in the phenomenon of military takeover in Africa.

Leaders of men of whatever philosophical bent (and in this particular instance, the military) must develop an ideology to endow their leadership with legitimacy—to convert their political influence into authority.<sup>28</sup> Historically, nationalism has been predicated on righteous self-determinism. The wider idea of universal concepts ranging from earthy liberalism to traditionalism above is in itself seen as "an ideological self-righteousness". Every one of the above stated philosophical concepts might easily qualify as a diplomatic instrument of ideology.

Between liberalism and traditionalism, the liberal military officer might initiate a coup on the ground that an outmoded constitution was the chief cause of national ills, whilst traditional military elites could also stage a coup, even a revolution, for alleged reason of illegitimacy, and consequent failure to arrive at a community of beliefs and consensus. The problem posed for the military elites is one of the democratic process and ideological

---

27. Robert W. J. : *The Origins of Modern African Thought* (London : Faber & Faber Ltd., 1968) pp. 30-32.

Cf : i) William Hanna : *Op. cit.* pp. 5, 11.

ii) Edward Blyden I : "Africa's Service to the World" reprinted in Henry Wilson (ed) *Origins of W. African Nationalism* (London : MacMillan & Co Ltd, 1969) p. 246. In his racial pride Blyden maintained that "... there is no people in whom the desire for race integrity and race preservation is stronger than the Negro".

28. Dahl : *Op. cit.* pp. 42-44.

Cf : Evan Luard : *Op. cit.* p. 309. Also Alfred de Grazia : *Op. cit.* pp. 124-127

orientation. Grazia points out also the problem of democracy in arriving at consensus as felt by other political writers such as Walter Bagehot, Emile Durkheim, Gaetano Mosca, Max Weber, Roberto Michels, Ortega Gasset, T. S. Elliot and John Dewey.

If this were so, the question arises as to the benefits of exchanging one ideology for another unless it could be proved that such an exchange would ensure greater economic prosperity and political security. Ideological sympathies should normally go to original countries of military orientation. For an example, a product of Sandhurst would be expected to develop British military orientation. It is not easy to explain the fact that *coups d'état* in many independent African states—states with British or French political systems, structures and experience, whose original military organisations were commanded and officered by products of Sandhurst and St. Cyr—are still toppled over by the very ideological products of those military institutions. It must be pointed out, if only to debate the point, that certain military coups have no clear-cut justifiable ideological bases. If military takeovers are alien-oriented, and copied as such, why are there no coups in France, Great Britain, America or even in Russia? If they are not foreign-oriented, what then is the ideological explanation? One can only say what one admires or experiences. The above posers nevertheless, cannot explain away the fact.

Political instability arising from mismanagement of government business by civil authorities cannot be said to have been terminated under military rule if one military takeover is followed by another in quick succession. Dahomey, Ghana, Nigeria, Zaire, Sudan and many other independent African states, most of which experienced more than one military takeover and are either directly ruled or experience military rule, make a nonsense out of any coherent theory of the ideological basis of military coups in Africa.

VII. The military elite, for their part, tend to displace a capitalist-oriented civilian government, but refuse while they are still in power to replace capitalism with a clear theory and practice of socialist-oriented government. The relationship of capitalism to imperialism is similar to socialism in general and European socialism in particular to Afro-Asian nationalism.

Mazrui puts it thus:

"Socialism is against the Capitalist;  
Nationalism is against the imperialist;  
But the capitalist and the imperialist are either  
the same man or two men in alliance;

Therefore

Nationalism and socialism in Africa can be either the same ideology  
or two ideologies in alliance".<sup>29</sup>

Although military rule, by its name suggests power backed by arms and ammunitions, which also vaguely suggests authoritarian power, yet many of the military governments basically operate (except for the stamp of decision-making, "Decree", "Edict"), as former civilian governments. Plausible explanations for the paradoxical phenomena which characterise military governments in Africa include:

---

29. Ali A. Mazrui: *Towards A Pax Africana* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1967) p. 99.

- (i) The military elites are interested more in quick change of government (coup d'etat) than in thorough-going revolution that would permanently change the social political and economic systems.
- (ii) On grappling with the hard facts of political life, the new political elites and that absolute military rule is antithetical to African political theory.
- (iii) There is an interlocking relationship between the political and economic systems of the West (e.g. USA) and East (USSR) and these affect military concepts.

It is difficult, therefore, to prove a set pattern of alien orientation of military coups, but even more difficult to disprove that communications with embassies of other governments by fellow travellers, friendship associations, local ideologues and sympathisers with foreign governments, do not have foreign influences on the ideologies with which they infest the military elite

VIII. **Coups d'etat** are contagious: the success of one in a country leads to similar attempt in another country. That may explain why more than three-quarters of independent African states are in the throes of direct or indirect military rule. In Africa south of the Sahara, five **coups d'etat** took place in 1966, namely: Central African Republic (Jan. 1), Upper Volta (Jan. 4), Nigeria (Jan. 15), Ghana (Feb. 24), and Burundi (Nov. 28). The first three occurred in January, the fourth in February, while the fifth occurred in November, 1966. Prior to these, the **coups d'etat** in the Congo (Zaire) Republic (Sept. 14, 1960); Ethiopia (Dec. 13, 1960); Togo (Jan. 13, 1963); Dahomey (October 28, 1963); Zanzibar (Jan. 12, 1964) and Gabon (Feb. 1964), all occurred within a four-year period. It may be assumed that unsuccessful **coups d'etat** followed by bloody purges would have served as a deterrent to subsequent attempts.

"If only 250 Togolese soldiers could overthrow their government, a Liberian army of 5,000 could seize power easily".<sup>30</sup>

Colonel David Thompson, Commander of Liberian's National Guards was alleged to have stated this three weeks after the assassination of President Sylvanus Olympio. He was arrested on suspicion of plotting the overthrow of the Liberian Government.

Ostentatious living and display of political power by top military "brass" breeds yet another contagion within the system itself because the second echelon of military elites would naturally aspire to positions of superior military command. In the same way that the first echelon of the military command displaced civil authorities, because of their ostentatious life, by the same token the second echelon seeks the overthrow of the first echelon for their unmilitary life-style.

Envy derides the excellence it cannot attain, but ambition coupled with proven performance might brook no excuse for quick, even if violent ascent to, I nearly said, seizure of power. Better performance, as an acceptable index for justifiable displacement of constituted authority might be defended on the Darwinian theory of survival of the fittest. The contagion of **coups d'etat**, however, could continue *ad infinitum* until and unless there

---

30. Claude E. Welch: "Soldier and State in Africa" in Doro. *Op. cit.*, pp. 167-168



D = Post-Military African Political Practice.

is a return to constitutionality and professional standard of conduct. In the old democracies, leaders of political parties and groups have discovered after bitter experiments with revolutionary changes that stability and constitutionality work together. In time, the present incidence of coups d'état will ebb—men will prefer their lives to political power in the face of bayonets, arms and ammunitions. The contagion of military takeovers in emergent Africa is complicated by the fact that the new breed of military officers are comparatively well-trained some with university education.

### Other Theories of Military Coups

There are other motives in addition to genuine intentions, rape of the Constitution, extravagance of the power elite, slow developments, tribalism and ethnic dominance, alien ideological orientation, revolutionary contagion, etc. behind military takeovers in Africa.

IX Displaced politicians languishing in exile have their theories: so do independent observers and the "common man". Former politicians during civilian governments attribute present coups d'état sweeping over the continent of Africa as being actuated by lust for power and glory. Power here is measured "by the degree of monopoly" which the successful coups makers have over technological instruments of violence.<sup>31</sup> De Grazia places coercion as use of force for the attainment of power:

"Political assassinations preparatory to seizing power, palace revolutions, "kidnapping" ballot boxes to prevent free elections, dispersal of all assemblages believed to be in the political opposition, intimidation of political opponents—these, too, are violent acts that aim at achievement or retention of power".

Whilst most of the acts listed above more appropriately hold true of political leaders, the factor of destructive use of power, through control of arms and ammunition is equally more associated with the military. Whilst the power of military elites are both impliedly and overtly demonstrated by violence capabilities resulting in physical take-over of governmental powers, euphemistically called "collection"\* rather than "seizure" of power. African political leaders employ the techniques of myth and mystique to sacralise and personalise power.

The use of all apparatus of both governmental and parliamentary device in the political system to impose a single authoritarian party is the equivalent of civilian bloodless coup; especially when it results in the withering of the opposition. Ironically, both the weak and strong factions, civil or military, of power seekers might employ the same reasons for imposing or resisting the imposition of political will. Major Mathieu Kerekou stated that the military took over the presidential government of Dahomean triumvirate in order to "avert civil war"; Harry Nkumbula, leader of African National Congress Party in Zambia, stated that he was resisting the creation of a one-party state government by President Kenneth Kaunda whose United National Independence Party controlled 110 seats as against 19 by African National Congress, in order to "avert civil war". His argument was

31. Leroy Graymer: *Op. cit.* p. 179. See also Grazia: *Political Behaviour*, p. 274.

\* Major Mathieu Kerekou, the fifth strongman of Dahomey, told news correspondents that he "collected" not seized, power.

that such a move would return Zambia to the days of colonial rule when only expatriates were members of government. He further threatened to take advantage of a constitutional provision which empowers members of Parliament to petition to the Chief Justice of Zambia to appoint a Commission to investigate the charges.\* The late President Kwame Nkrumah and President Milton Obote, who lost control of political power by default (while away) have sharply criticised the military as being motivated by the lust for power and glory.

Members of the armed forces are like independent observers of the achievements and shortcomings of political elites in civilian regimes. They witness the rise of parvenues, the inexcusable extravagance of men of opulence and the shocking injustices perpetrated by relevant authority in utter disregard of legality. In addition, they watch their compeers in government and private service rise to high positions of material well-being. The arrival of independence, however, caught its "givers" and "receivers" alike wholly unprepared. The iron curtain which, here-to-fore, separated the presidential palaces and luxurious ministerial quarters of members of the civilian government from the slums, ramshackle huts and "black holes" districts, became self-evident.

X. Military officers' demand were no longer confined to paucity of promotion, pay rise, and attractive conditions of service, especially for other ranks: they were elaborated to include university-type quantitative and qualitative officers corps, strong resentment against continued discipleship under expatriate officers. The post-independence demands of African officers corps run parallel to the demands of the political power elites under civilian governments, e.g.

#### **Civilian Demands/Life-Style**

1. Demand for political independence.
2. Demand for increases in salaries and wages.
3. Extravagance, corruption and scandalous life-style by power elite.
4. Growth of civil service, parliament and economy.
5. Presence of foreign officers and military pacts re-inforces authority of civilian govts.
6. Political schism and instability leads to failure of govt.

#### **Military Demands/Life-Style**

1. Demand for independence of officer corps from expatriate officer control.
2. Mooted appeal for attractive conditions of service.
3. Resentment at undisciplined life-style of the civilian rulers and hope to improve own life-style.
4. Equal growth in military formations, officer corps and other ranks.
5. Presence of external forces is resented, whilst their departure enhances power and prestige of the military.
6. Seizure of power by the military and reversal of former roles.

32

An increase in the officer corps to be meaningful requires a corresponding increase in the number of intakes of other ranks. This of course, would entail

\* Voice of America, 1 Nov. 1972, 8 p.m. newscast Cf. The "Second Republic" Time Magazine, 6 November 1972, p. 44. Africa "Zambia One-Party Plot?" 15 November, 1972, pp. 12-14.

32. See graphic comparison of military officers corps vs. Civilian power elites demands.

enormous government expenditure on the military. Honest attempts to satisfy one aspect of military demand naturally lead to more demands. Officers with improved conditions of service consequently question the reason, at all, for the existence of whatever remaining differences. In other words, what was good for the political elites occupying unworldly mansions, was also good for the defenders of nation's honours. They, too are entitled to power and glory.

XI. The presence of expatriate military officers at the helm of affairs makes it difficult, if not impossible, for lowly-placed indigenous officers to mount loud protests. Their unattractive conditions of service may not be openly admitted as the main cause of their resentment, but it is the crux of the matter. They see their roles as onerous; it demands the making of the supreme sacrifice if need be, in defence of the nation but without commensurate remuneration. The domineering influence of foreign military officers is grounds for rightful indignation. The ineffectiveness of indigenous officers' call for reforms is aggravated by lack of intellectual leadership. Military skill alone could not suffice; additional academic training on university or equivalent level which, until recently was lacking, would have filled a serious gap in the dealings of officers with political leaders. In other words, there was insufficient political education of officers in those early days. Officers could only feel but could not express what went right or wrong in the daily lives of the power elite.

The power vacuum created by the departure of expatriate officers whose home governments helped maintain political and military stability and by so doing, raised the prestige of the ruling class, subsequently played into the hand of the indigenous officer corps. Where no military pacts existed and where such as existed were abrogated in the face of public pressure—the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact for an example—abrogation counts as an added advantage to the military formation.<sup>33</sup>

In the absence of an existing military pact, an outside power would most unlikely intervene in the internal affairs of an independent state. The invitation sent by Prime Minister Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone to President Sekou Toure of Guinea for the despatch of the latter's armed forces to defend the sovereign integrity of the former's government against military coup, saved the life of the government. This further means that in the absence of foreign intervention, every increase in the prestige of military elites eggs its leaders to play a more decisive role in the affairs of the nation.

Mismanagement of the affairs of the state by dominant and ruling political party which had silenced the opposition party (parties) and later rode roughshod over public opinion in the belief that it (they) had a monopoly of the instruments of warfare, in fact, plays into the hands of the military elite. Arms and ammunitions are useful only when operated by human beings; and if such human beings the military, choose strike in their personal interest

---

33. Session Paper No. 4 of 1960 for Draft Defence Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Govt. of the Federation of Nigeria.

Also : Claude S. Philips : *The Development of Nigerian Foreign Policy* (Chicago : Northwestern U. Press, 1964) pp. 146—148. Appendix II for text.

and not in the interest of feuding political parties, the nation is startled with the news of a military *coup d'état*.

More often than not, the new leaders seize control of not only the central radio station, wireless services, post office, airfield, public buildings and offices, but also the luxurious state houses and ministerial quarters. Control of the sacred symbols of the state and existing regime is the agitational procedure of seizure of power. The kidnapping or assassination of the king, President or Prime Minister, is deemed a more serious act than seizure of radio stations, the capital and post offices, but they are all revolutionary acts.<sup>34</sup>

XII. The former charge of lust for power and glory as a motive force for *coups d'état* in Africa cannot be validated with the argument of undemocratic life-style. What catches the imagination of the generality of people though, is the degree of social stratification evident during the regime of successive political elites. Corruption may be associated with one, bulging bank accounts deposited in foreign banks with another, while the affluence and influence of relatives and friends with still another. No government goes scot-free and none tries. Experiences such as these might be traceable rather to the monarchical style and royalist tendencies in the African political systems than to the respective governments. They originate from incessant demands made on the political system by African nuclear as well as extended families.

The extended family system in Africa and the presence of an unlimited number of hangers-on leave the established member of the family with little free conscience. Viewed as the umbrella which guarantees political and economic protection to the rest of the family, he must exhibit evidence of material success as a member of the ruling class. Friends and immediate relations of highly placed military officers have a tendency to advertise their material successes far in excess of reality. They do so partly with the intention of boosting their collective ego but in the process do enormous harm to their relations. The impression, right or wrong, is thus created that the military displaced the civilian government in order to receive public acclaim and enrich themselves and their families. It can, of course, be argued that public honours are neither peculiar to nor reserved exclusively for civil authority; furthermore, military life need not preclude wealth honestly acquired.

Inasmuch as the propaganda technique of mixing half-truths with cut-right lie affects the credulous, thoroughly dishonest military officers, even if they constitute a microscopic minority, are inadvertently grouped together with honest ones. The allegation consequently gains currency that military takeovers in independent African states are phenomena motivated by lust for power and glory, thus rendering the original intentions of coup-makers non-altruistic.

#### **Divine Revelation Theory:**

Political power elites fit into different socio-political and economic philosophical moulds. The growth of African nationalism and the use of Western

---

34. De Grazia: *Ibid.* p. 283.

Cf: Nigeria — Luckman, *Op cit.* pp. 4—7. Military expansionism among the Majors of January in Nigeria reflects the *Value* not the *maintenance* of the army.

political concepts in description of personality types leaves us with various phenomena of leadership.

For an example, the personal magnetism of the late Kwame Nkrumah (Osagyefo or saviour) as political ruler of his party and nation is an example of charismatic leadership. Notwithstanding whatever might be described as his shortcomings, and his critics see them as many, the fact is that "the effects of charism and personal magnetism demagoguery or genuine appeal"\* as Easton typifies the phenomenon made many a Ghanaian accept them as right and proper and, therefore, binding on members of the political system. Other political leaders, including so-called agitators and demagogues, negotiators and pacifists, radiate mixed categories of legal-rational appeals, ranging from messianic, spurious charismatic, to Fabian democratic.

A quick glance at ideologies of the "new nations" of the third World calls to mind variants of charismatic-messianic-mystical personality types: Mao-Tse-Tung, Sukarno, Jawaharian Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Habib Bourguiba, Sekou Toure, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Fidel Castro and Mahatma Gandhi. Their authority roles were either directly inherited or transferred from displaced systems.

It is within the context of transferability of authority roles and the personal legitimacy associated with leadership of succeeding regimes that we have to comment briefly on the Divine Revelation Theory of General Idi Amin of Uganda. His personality type might be more easily classified if this work were a study of Negritude, for his folksy, unorthodox, personalized approach to Ugandan politics is at once messianic, as though he possessed mystical warranty and also remarkable example of African nationalism.

When nationalism, however, goes beyond mere identification with religious appeal to actual claim of Godliness, we have what should conveniently and rightly be called the Divine Revelation Theory, as one of the many reasons and motives for military coups d'etat in Africa. No other military leader in contemporary African politics epitomizes this theory more than General Idi Amin Dada of Uganda. Idi Amin maintains that he is propelled by divine revelation in his new approach to African politics, as stated in a newspaper interview. (Sunday Times, Dec. 10, 1972, Lagos, pp. 12-13).

"Early in August this year I was at Frumoya, a town in the northern part of Uganda. In the dream, God told me that if I wanted the economy of my country in the hands of the Africans, I must expel all non-citizens of this country to their own countries together with all those who do not have the interests of Uganda at heart.

I had that dream early in the morning and immediately after I drove my jeep from Frumoya to Tororo where I addressed paratroopers. I told them that all those Asians who in 1962 were asked to become Uganda's citizens and refused would have to leave the country".

---

\* David Easton: *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. (New York: 1967), pp. 302-307.

## Prospects Under the Military, 1960-70

As a rule, the Military do not rule alone. They have at their disposal and for obvious reasons, the services of experienced politicians, academics and other civil authorities. It is not the purpose here to discuss the prospects under the military whose rule completes the second half of the spherical graph\* of African nationalism. On assumption of power by the military, either in response to an invitation from leaders of the outgoing government or by direct intervention, military leaders discover the facts of political life, namely, that military government is not entirely military. In the same way that the civilian authorities, the new class of Western and Eastern oriented elites who inherited power from colonial rulers, lagged in distributive capabilities, so the military fear an ever-widening credibility gap in social and economic performances. That the military are uniquely mobilized through Edicts and weaponry capabilities to forestall and, if need be, quell strikes, sabotage, civil riots and in extreme case, revolution, does not mean that civil discontent might not simmer under the surface. The injection of civilian ministers commissioners and technocrats in the government is a way of ensuring smooth military-civilian co-operation.

Spokesmen of military regimes in independent Africa frequently declare that they intervened in the interest of the people. The use of civilian advisers, therefore, is not only desirable for administrative and other purposes, but also because an avowed government of the people for the people must carry either the people or their representatives or both with it. The military, too, must endeavour to strike for a "consensus".

The year 1960 may conveniently be used as a high water mark for independent Africa in terms of attainment of independence by states and also of intervention by the military. Over a ten year period, from 1960-70, the military prospects pattern has shown little evidence of concretization. Hardly 2 month passes without real or suspected coups d'état being reported from independent African states. Some states like Dahomey in West Africa are reportedly more prone to coups, having experienced at least six such phenomena since independence in 1960.<sup>36</sup> Monsieur Justin Ahomadegbe's government was overthrown as shots rang through the capital city of Cotonou, on charges of "tribalism, corruption, nepotism", etc.

In considering the typologies of political systems under which the military operate in independent Africa, the simple typology provides room for two distinct classifications: (1) oligarchy and (2) traditionalistic order. Military rule by its very name and nature cannot fit properly into the democratic model, that is of political democracy.<sup>37</sup> The oligarchical political system is either military, civilian or mixed. An "apolitical" military regime rules without civilian political elite, but its rule is mixed when the military themselves become demonstrably "politicized". In such an attempt to contain the traditional establishment, the military elites alienate the

---

\* See Illustration.

36. Voice of America, Oct. 27, 1972, 8 p.m. newscast, Cf : The "Second Republic, Time Magazine, 6. Nov. 1972, p. 44.

37. H.V. Wiseman: *Political Systems* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) pp. 70-73.

professional military formation and, consequently, render top military echelon susceptible to agitational and revolutionary plots. At this stage, the opposing camps of the former political elite seek the alliance of the ideologically divided military command.

If the power base of the military is sufficiently rooted in legitimacy, the contagion of counter-coup might be forestalled indefinitely and after a period of syncretistic rule, power is voluntarily yielded to the civilian political elite. An alternative course is for the military elite to mobilize the nation, insist on mono-culture, forge a common ideology, a single party system, resulting in an effective constitutional arrangement in which the military provide the Head of State or President, and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.<sup>38</sup>

In the event of a syncretistic rule the government undergoes 12 conveniently selected stages :

1. Syncretistic Rule
2. Military handover
3. Elections : Parliamentary government  
Full re-emergence of civilian elites.
4. Effective civilian government.
5. Reappearance of conservative thought.
6. Gradual compromise of political independence.
7. Reaction
8. Political party power control :  
Emergence of dominant single party.
9. Institutional intransigence.
10. Withering of opposition party/parties.
11. Civil disorder, leading to military takeover
12. Military rule

As yet, there is no available evidence of unalterable law of political systems which tilts the balance of military rule one way or the other and, therefore, no reliable data on useful predictiveness of a constant pattern of the prospects of army rule. What is possible at the present moment is to pinpoint the factors of misrule and ambition, among others, whose persistence in the political systems have led to recurrence of *coups d'état* in independent Africa. By the same token one can arrive at a plausible conclusion.

#### Conclusion :

Our critical study of military *coup d'état* in independent states of Africa, demonstrates a recurrent phenomenon. It assumes :

1. That the African continent is still in a state of flux.
2. That African elites and decision-makers are confronted with seemingly insoluble problems of division and integration as a result of the conflicting centrifugal pull of traditionalism (tribalism) and centripetal pull of nationalism (mono-culture).
3. That the pressures on men and matters affect all aspects of nationalist and, therefore, state endeavour and menace the political systems to a breaking point—hence military takeover and rule

38. The UAR under Nasser, Zaire Republic under General Mobutu Sese Seko ; Uganda under General Idi Amin etc. are examples.



4. That the same process repeats itself in the absence of built-in safety devices in the political system.

These assumptions are valid only to the extent that the elites are averse to codes of professional standards of conduct. Such safety devices must include human variables. Decision-makers with professional standards of conduct ought to foresee the danger to themselves and the political system, of (a) tribalism and corruption (b) violent and unconstitutional method of change of government (c) dependent foreign policy and flirtation with foreign ideologies for profit.

Fortunately, the continent of Africa has some bright lights, lit by individuals whose private and public lives, and whose political philosophy are beyond question. The relative stability in their political systems gives room for hope that the present graph of African nationalism is but a passing phase, and that the strictures which punctuate African political systems will ultimately make way for enduring peace and stability.