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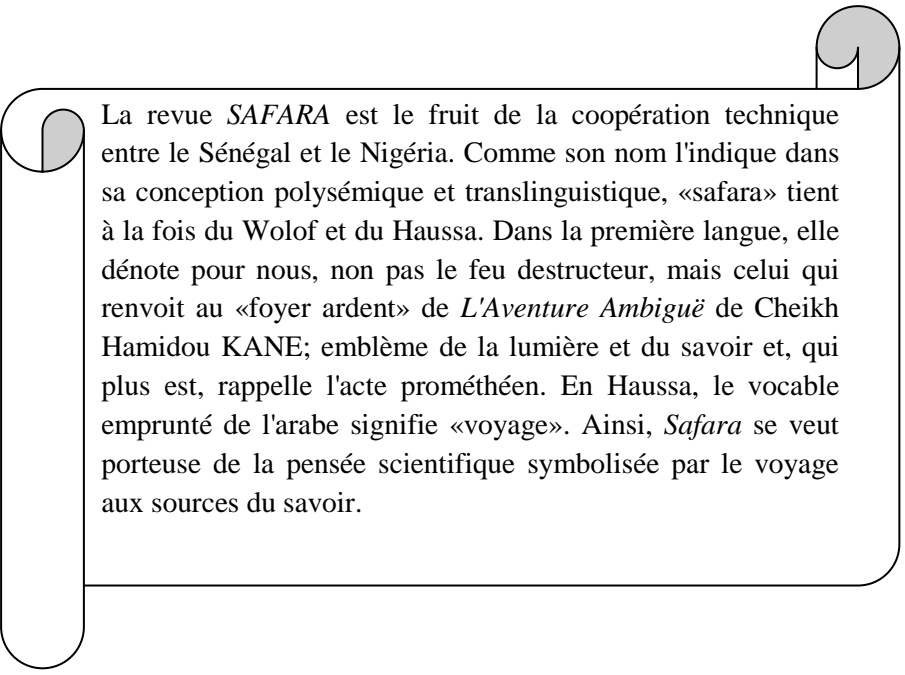
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La revue *SAFARA* est le fruit de la coopération technique entre le Sénégal et le Nigéria. Comme son nom l'indique dans sa conception polysémique et translinguistique, «safara» tient à la fois du Wolof et du Haussa. Dans la première langue, elle dénote pour nous, non pas le feu destructeur, mais celui qui renvoie au «foyer ardent» de *L'Aventure Ambiguë* de Cheikh Hamidou KANE; emblème de la lumière et du savoir et, qui plus est, rappelle l'acte prométhéen. En Haussa, le vocable emprunté de l'arabe signifie «voyage». Ainsi, *Safara* se veut porteuse de la pensée scientifique symbolisée par le voyage aux sources du savoir.

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Liberal Democracy and Governance in Africa: A Brief Critique

Aboubacar Abdullah SENGHORE^{*}

I. INTRODUCTION

“It was not until the intensification of popular struggles for democracy in the 1980s that African scholars turned their attention specifically to the question of democracy on the continent” (Archie Mafeje: 1999).

According to Archie, the above is not to say there was no awareness of democracy prior to the 80s, but rather for the purpose of highlighting the emergence of its dramatic proportion as a result of the growing euphoria for democracy among African [scholars]. Hence the clamor for liberal democracy by Africans was a somewhat reactionary attempt against the growing ruthlessness and despotic manifestations by many African governments with their actions devoid of every anticipated positive payoff of breaking from the colonial yoke. Such actions included the institution by many, of one party systems, characterized by limited rule of law, dwindling economies, growing abject poverty, domestic conflicts; the absence of popular participation, and where it exists, sometimes in the form of elections, they are marred by intimidation, fraud and so on.

Consequently, the agitation for “second independence” as put by Ake was all the more desirable by many Africans. It served as a catalyst for a more deepened call for democratic pluralism around Africa as the answer to our governance vis-à-vis development problems.

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However, as indicated above, liberal democracy was embraced by Africans to offer ‘heavenly solutions’ to Africa’s governance and development predicaments. Therefore, against the foregoing, this article examines liberal democracy by highlighting its nature and form taking due cognizance of its practice in Africa. Second, it shall assess to what extent liberal democracy has delivered on its anticipated objectives in Africa amidst high hopes to restore the shattered anticipated development and prosperity that post-independence was meant to usher in. Finally, the paper makes an attempt to suggest a possible solution to the existing problems of the systemic and the managerial aspects of African governance.

II. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AS A SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

- **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND**

Democracy has been defined in various ways using different approaches. Seward argues that the best approach is to look at those countries known to be democratic and define the concept according to the main features of their practice. (Seward 1994:6-2 1)

For Beetham, who takes the second approach the core principle of a democratic system are those embodied in the historical conception of democracy as “rule of the people” i.e. popular control or sovereignty and political equality? (Beetham 1993:6).

According to Holden who constructs a conception of political democracy, inclusive citizenship and political equality are basic principles of a democratic system. (Holden 1974:7-9).

The definitions reviewed above seem to agree that there are four basic elements or core values of a democratic system i.e. equality, sovereignty/control and inclusiveness. These include majority rule and participation, equality, freedom, consensus, coercion, competition, pluralism, constitutional rule and more.

Seward develops the assumption that in a democratic system “all citizens are equal with respect to their right to decide the appropriate political course of their community”.

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It is important to state here that the basic characteristics of democracy are just more than the three-core principles highlighted above. The pillars of democracy include:

- Free press
- Respect for human rights
- Constitutionalism
- Free and fair elections (regular)
- Separation of powers
- Popular participation
- Majority rule with respect for the (minority etc
- Pluralism.

With all these pillars one can then argue that many political systems across the continent are, at least structurally, democratic. This definition of democracy has been re-emphasised by the Western donors viz: IMF/World Bank since the 1980s when democracy in the sense of popular participation, good governance and respect for human rights including press freedom were a prerequisite for obtaining their assistance. It is on the basis of this equality assumption that Seward develops a general defining rule of democracy ‘Within the theory of democracy’. Thus, according to this rule “substantive policy, and politics and administrative actions performed under substantive policy must correspond to the expressed preferences of a majority of citizens” In other words” there should be necessary correspondence between acts of a government and the equally weighted expressed wishes of citizens with respect to those acts. This is what Seward calls “responsive rule” and for him” a political system is democratic to the extent that and only to the extent that it involves realisation of the responsive rule”.

The problem of the “responsive rule” definition is that it appears to suggest direct, rather than, representative forms of decision making as the favourite. This is because direct decision-making processes are certainly more responsive than the representative forms. But in Africa in general and in West Africa in particular, what obtains is the representative mechanisms of decision-making. To remedy this shortcoming of “the responsive rule” definition, which he himself acknowledges, Seward identifies some core principles or minimal conditions and describes them as “the logically necessary conditions of democracy”. These principles are: Basic Freedoms, citizenship and participation, administrative code, publicity and social rights.

So for a political system to be democratic, at least from the liberal democracy point of view, it has to observe and respect the basic freedoms of the individual and it also must have a common and standardised form of legal membership compatible with the basic freedoms. There should also be appropriate codes of procedure for employees in public bodies, for decisions to be taken into effect and a constant formal process of public notification of decisions, opinions, arguments, issues and outcomes of all these conditions or basic principles of democracy.

According to Saward, there is another view, which believes that democracy, being the rule of the people by the people and for the people implies, in political terms, the right of the people to freely choose their representatives. In his opinion “a democratic administration is one in which the people, all the people, are enabled to express a free choice on all matters affecting them”. (Saward 1994:6-21).

For Hague and Harrop, liberal democracy, particularly in the modern time, means that citizenship is no longer an elite status but it is now extended to the vast majority of the adult population. Likewise, today’s democracies are representative rather than direct (Hague and Harrop 2004: 38-39) Thus, elections under this system are regarded as an expression rather than a denial of democracy. According to this view, the meaning of democracy in the modern time is contrary to what the ancient Greeks viewed it to be. For the Greeks, elections were used as an “instrument of aristocracy” that is, a “device for selecting qualified people for technical tasks which required an unfortunate departure from self government” (Hague and Harrop 2004: 38-39)

The modern meaning of liberal democracy also includes: A system of government based on a liberal philosophy in which the scope of state powers is restricted by the constitution. Thus under liberal democracy the constitution is supreme and then followed by the legislature. (Hague and Harrop 2004: 38-39)

This is a direct reference to the modern concept of the “rule of law” which emphasizes the supremacy of the authority of the law. Rule of law in this sense is one of the basic components and essential ingredients of democratic governance under the liberal democracy construction.

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According to the Liberal democratic construction both rule of law and constitutional rule are essential for a system of government to be truly democratic and the two principles are further explained below.

The rule of law

By the rule of law is meant the supremacy of the authority of the law that all people and institutions are equally subjected to the control and dictates of the law. The principle of the rule of law teaches about the equality of people before the law and equal protection of the law, the legality of the administrative acts of the political authorities and fairness or constitutionality of the legal authority backing the legislative and administrative activities of the government of the day. In other words it is not only enough to govern by law, but the law that we use to govern must be just, fair and reasonable.

Constitutional rule

The principle of constitutional rule as a core-element of a democratic system can only be effective if the Constitution enjoys a supremacy status within the political system. The concept of constitutional supremacy teaches that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land and all other laws, executive decisions and administrative activities of the government of the day must be in conformity with the constitution, otherwise, they are declared null and void by a court of competent jurisdiction. This principle has been established in section 4 of the 1997 Constitution of the second republic of The Gambia. Constitutional supremacy also ensures a more conducive environment for the observance of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary.

This brief explanation of the nature and characteristics of liberal democracy as a system of government is absolutely necessary because it clearly shows that the problems of African governance are not originating from this system of governance. Rather they could possibly be due to the poor and irresponsible attitude of leaders of post independence Africa in most countries of the continent

III. DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE
• GOVERNANCE AND GOVERNMENT

While government refers to the machinery and institutional arrangements for the exercise of sovereign power for serving the internal and external interests of the political community, governance implies the process as well as the result of making authoritative decisions for the benefit of society. (Mander and Asif, 2004 P.11)

Thus, governance means the act or process of governing, specifically, authoritative decisions and control. (Webster's dictionary) Governance is the interaction between formal institutions and those in civil society. Another definition describes governance as "a process whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and social uplift". (Mander and Asif 2004, P.12.) For the World Bank, governance is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Consequently the term governance includes public sector management, accountability, the legal framework, transparency and information". Many governments, international organisations, and multilateral and bilateral donor agencies including the Asian Development Bank share this World Bank's understanding of the notion of governance. (The World Bank 1992 Governance and Development P.1, and Mander and Asif 2004, P. 12)

Consequently, governance refers to "the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal (or human) rights (and fundamental freedoms), meet their obligations and mediate their differences". (Mader & Asif bid) also (A.A Senghore, PhD: 2010).

The act of exercising economic, political and administrative powers of the state to manage its affairs at all levels becomes democratic when the exercise is conducted and the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which such authority is

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exercised are created and functioned in accordance with the spirit of the basic principles of democratic governance identified above (A.A Senghore, PhD: 2010).

In other words, a democratic government must be guided by a constitution, the principle of respect for human rights and the rule of law and free participation of citizenry in the government of their country. Modern international human rights conventions have guaranteed the right of every citizen to participate freely in the government of their country and to have equal access, on the basis of non-discrimination, to the government and its services. (Arts.2 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and 13 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights).

However, beyond defining the concept of democracy as a participatory system of Government, the emphasis from the 1980s was on good governance a concept that involves bottom top participation from the election and empowerment of officials of the local governments to the legislature and executive, the free press is underscored to create an atmosphere of transparency. It is expected to inform and also expose shady deals, corruption, nepotism, ineptitude, election malpractices etc. It is therefore intended to play the role of a watchdog, Press freedom is not only a basic component of democracy but it is also a central element of good governance. This brings us to a very important question that needs to be addressed viz: What is good governance, is it the same as democratic governance? And has liberal democracy been able to ensure good governance for post independence Africa? (A.A Senghore, PhD: 2010).

- **WHAT IS GOOD GOVERNANCE?**

The above discussion on the nature of governance implies that governance has three major components namely, process, content and deliveries. Factors such as transparency and accountability are included in the process while values like justice and equity are included in the content of governance. The third element (deliveries) ensures that the citizens especially the poorest have the basic needs and live a life with dignity. It needs to be clarified at this juncture that being able to deliver does not by itself constitute good governance, there is no doubt that a

dictatorship that delivers basic needs to the citizens is better than a dictatorship that does not, but this is not enough to be good governance. (Mader and Asif 2004: 14-15)

Good governance on the other hand implies an administration that is sensitive and responsive to the needs of the people and is effective in coping with emerging challenges in society by strictly adhering to and implementing the principles of democracy discussed above. For the World Bank, good governance “is epitomized by predictable, opened and enlightened policy making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos, an executive arm of government accountable for its actions and a strong civil society participation in public affairs and all behaving under the rule of law”. This description of good governance by the World Bank obviously epitomises the democratic principles of transparency, accountability, participation, respect for the rule of law and separation of powers. The European Union believes that “in the context of a political and institutional environment that upholds human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, good governance is the transparent and accountable management of human, natural, economic and financial resources for equitable and sustainable development”. (Mander and Asif 2004:15) This envisages a situation where there are clear decision making procedures at the level of public authorities, transparent and accountable institutions, the primacy of law in managing and distributing resources and capacity building for elaborating and implementing anti corruption measures. Government of the Netherlands added the elements of security, decentralisation and participation of civil society to the EU’s definition of good governance. It argues that good governance must allow “a responsible economic and financial management of public and natural resources for the purpose of economic growth, social development and poverty reduction in an equitable and sustainable manner, with the use of clear participatory procedures for public decision-making, transparent and accountable institutions, primacy of law in the management and distribution of resources, effective measures to prevent and combat corruption, support for leadership and empowerment of men and women”. (Mander and Asif 2004:15)

These two definitions of good governance by the EU and the government of the Netherlands have substantially incorporated the principles and basic characteristics of democratic governance already alluded to. However, it is obvious from the

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exposition of both democratic and good governance that sometimes emphasis is laid on the managerial aspect of governance while at some point the focus is on the systemic aspect. The former is a characteristic of the definition of good governance whereas the latter is a natural outcome of the definition of democratic governance. Whatever the case maybe, for the government of the day to be both good and democratic, the two aspects of governance (systemic and managerial) must be adequately enforced. In other words, the system within which one governs must be based on the core values of democracy while the style and manner of managing the resources and affairs of a country are not only transparent, accountable or effective but also equitable and sustainable. However, it is important to note at this juncture that the system highlighted above can only be followed and exhaustively utilised if our leaders demonstrate positive and responsible attitude in the governing process of their respective jurisdictions.

- **HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY**

In the modern art of governance, the linkage between democracy and human rights is not only real but it is genuinely crucial. The two are not necessarily the same but it is fair to say that any struggle for democracy particularly in Africa, is by definition a struggle for human rights. Furthermore, human rights do not exist or prosper in undemocratic societies.

According to Zehra Arat “Where a political system falls on the scale of democracy largely depends on the extent to which it recognises and enforces civil and political rights. The more strongly civil and political rights are reinforced in a society the more democratic it becomes”. (Zahra Arat 2000:2-4) The international human rights movement has, both in theory and practice, always emphasised democratic principles. The global and regional instruments have identified several democratic principles as fundamental human rights. These include popular participation, multiple political parties, freedom of expression and press freedom, equal access to public services, periodic and genuine elections. Democracy is about those values and they are also fundamental human rights. This explains why human rights are a basic value for a genuine democratic system of governance under liberal democracy construction.

In view of the above argument, one may conclude that democratic governance itself is a fundamental human right. To conclude, liberal democracy as depicted in this section is undoubtedly a sound system of governance and regardless of my criticism of the concept below, democracy if applied the way it is explained could definitely have substantially resolved many of the crises and complications of African governance in the modern time. It follows from this exposition that the problems of governance in Africa are not as a result of the system of government adopted by the post independence leaders but they are, as I have already alluded to, due to the attitude of leader and politicians from all over the continent.

The section below briefly examines the nature and types of the political and leadership crises in post independence Africa

IV. NATURE OF THE GOVERNANCE CRISIS UNDER LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES IN AFRICA

The nature of the governance problems in Africa keeps on changing from one form to another. During the few years that immediately followed independence, Africa was engulfed in destructive and senseless civil wars, whereas throughout the period of the cold war the continent became a favorite playground for the super powers. This unfortunate situation produced a unique brand of leadership problem for Africa which aggravated the continent's governance crisis. The leaders of this period were giving priority to their own personal or individualistic interests on one hand and on the other, they put the economic, political and strategic interests of their foreign masters and allies above those of the indigenous people whose interests they were exclusively contracted to serve.

In some cases the problems were systemic in nature. While some leaders introduced unpopular and failed Marxist economic policies without the consent of their people, others haphazardly pursued western capitalist economic models and as a result they horribly failed their people. There were other leaders, who by their style of leadership, engaged their countries in senseless and destructive wars, as a result of which they sank their national economies. Furthermore, those internal

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conflicts enabled the leaders concerned to loot their national treasuries and therefore exposing millions of Africans across the continent to abject poverty.

As a result of economic exploitation, political repression and the eventual failure of the social welfare and public service delivery systems throughout Africa, millions of Africans are, today, exposed to severe economic hardships, political instability and socio-economic insecurity. As a result of the crisis of the post independence period particularly during the 1970s and 1980s most economies in Africa experienced dramatic decline and eventual down fall (Al Mufruki, 2001).

Domestic conflicts and civil wars count for more than 70% of the leadership crisis during this period. In 2001 it was estimated that “there was a war in at least one out of three (African) countries and there was only a relative peace in the continent. The situation continued to be tense, either due to ethnic and regional troubles or religious disagreements” (Al Mufruki, 2001).

The crisis highlighted above, though sometimes appearing in different forms, continue to exist together with other problems, to the present day and they still obstruct Africa’s economic development and progress. Those wide ranging problems include the following: mall electoral practices, disputes over election results, persistent refusal by incumbent leaders to share power with political opponents, the spread of civilian led autocratic rule and military dictatorships which block all means of democratic and peaceful leadership succession, the unprecedented rise of the cost of living and basic commodities at a time when only 4% of national budgets are currently spent on agriculture, the dramatic increase in the cost of fertilizer, the continuous rise in the cost of fuel, the instances of daily power cuts because of inadequate generating capacity or severe shortage of fuel for heavy duty generators, the absence of potential foreign investors from many countries in our continent due to poor infrastructure and communication facilities, poor human rights records of governments across Africa. (Richard Dowden, 2008).

The economic and political situations in Africa today are still fragile and too bad for the continent to regain the ground it has lost. Growth rates are still very low in many countries, poverty is still rampant and wide spread, national economies of the majority of countries are fragile and therefore vulnerable to domestic and external shocks, domestic savings are very low, many countries continue still to depend to a

large extent, on foreign products for their basic commodities and human rights violations and abuses continue to be rampant. There is gross inadequate support and poor management of the agricultural sector and the continent is still unable “to reap the full benefits of globalization – a process that could increase the resources available for productive investment that Africa needs so badly (Alhassan Outtara, 1999).

The democratic successes recorded by Ghana and Senegal recently and also Mali before its current political crises in achieving democratic and peaceful leadership succession through free and fair electoral processes are few but positive exceptions to the picture painted above. There is a general tendency on the part of many African analysts of viewing Africa’s problems in terms of the excesses of individual dictators and autocratic leaders and their wrong doings. They argue that it was these irresponsible leaders who turned several parts of the continent into killing fields in senseless wars and that only their removal from power, preferably through democratic and peaceful means, can make a difference. In other words, a change in government through democratic means is the main pre-requisite for making a fresh start and attracting foreign investments and economic aids crucial to rescue their economies. (Tunde Obodina, 2000) In 1996 alone the international humanitarian mission to Africa cost more than 3 billion US dollars whereas only one third of this money could have been used to comprehensively address the entire economic and developmental problems of the warring countries. While the rest of the money could do a lot of good things toward solving the continent’s entire economic and developmental problems.

All these crises are happening under liberal democracies of various forms with periodic elections taking place every where across the continent. Thus, it is genuine to ask at this juncture whether the governance crises in Africa are as a result of the adoption of liberal democracy as a system of government in most part of the continent or such problems are originated in the negative and irresponsible attitude of leaders of the post independence Africa. The latter, as suggested by many governance and legal experts, human rights advocates, researchers and academics from across the continent, are being described as the main cause of the governance and developmental problems of post independence Africa (AA Senghore, PhD: 2010)

V. LOOKING AT DEMOCRACY AS AN IDEOLOGY OR AN INSTRUMENT OF SOCIAL PROGRESS

“It is correct to generalize that after the collapse of the Soviet Union the majority of the world perceived democracy as an instrument of social progress” (Lumumba-Kasongo: 2005). This strong assumption engulfs Africans too. However, this drive towards democratization, to be specific, liberal democracy had produced mixed results for Africa. Thus, at this juncture, it will be imperative to reflect over the democratic project in Africa. Many African countries, after independence, were engulfed in a wave of democratization as the perceived magic formula for the achievement of their development agenda, justice, freedom, equality, and economic independence.

However, there emerged stumbling blocks to the achievement of such grandiose ideas that were anticipated. As a result of ideological warfare between the Capitalist West and the Communist East (Soviet and the former Eastern Bloc), the democratic project was hijacked and as indicated above Africa became an ideological battle ground for these competing powers. The institutions that were intended to serve this purpose for the achievement of justice, freedom, equality and development were turned into agents of manipulation for the furtherance of their agendas. The resultant polarization contributed to the establishment of the most notorious dictators in Africa, including Idi Amin of Uganda, Mobutu of D R Congo and Eyadema of Togo (Lumumba-Kasongo: 2005). Also, and as explained above, the fulfillment of frequent renewal of mandate for legitimacy purposes as a democratic principle has proven to be another stumbling block to the sustenance of democracies in Africa. This, where it exist at all, it happens in the form of elections which are, often marred by violence and often generates enough potential for a country to slide into conflict as was the case few years ago in Kenya during its post-election skirmishes and currently in Egypt.

Another challenge to this effort was the disintegration of an “independence consensus.” This consensus cut across ethnic boundaries and availed the independence movements around Africa a unified front to attain independence.

However, soon this consensus will break and pose a serious challenge to the existence of the state itself and consequently the democratic project in Africa.

This is clearly demonstrated by the bloody conflict in Somalia in the Horn of Africa and before in Liberia and Serra Leone in the Manu-river region of West Africa.

The objective of this enumeration, however, is not meant to be exhaustive, but to avail us the picture of the democratic process in Africa, and some of its challenges as a lead up to discussing the variants of liberal democracy.

VI. THE LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IMPERATIVE

The form of liberal democracy we have today may not, in fact, be synonymously represented by what has been propounded by the enlightenment philosophers. According to this small group of intellectuals, man's actions should be guided by reason and underpinned by principles of liberty and equality. This whole idea of liberalism was to counter the widely held notions like divine kingship or absolutism. The questioning of such ruler ship was regarded blasphemous. These awkward notions led to the birth of liberalism and subsequent institution of systems of government as counter measures against aristocratic and monarchical rule. Efforts at the institution of liberalism can be traced to the French and American Revolutions. Their resultant governments represent a prototype liberal government. It met stiff resistance from the royal houses or traditional monarchy. In the face of this resistance, nonetheless, it was able to mainstream itself by the end of the nineteenth century and, since then have become the dominant theory of government, enjoying the endorsement of a myriad of the political spectrum.

However, it is worth noting that the symbiotic relationship between democracy and liberalism has not been an all rosy one, given their points of emphasis. It is argued that liberals are not necessarily democrats (Kilcullen: 2000) Liberalism, in its classical form, is highly individualistic and, democracy is often viewed as a collectivist ideal concerned with the empowering of the masses as underscored by R. S. Kilcullen:

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In the early 19th Century, when liberalism was in its heyday, the term liberal democracy would have seem paradoxical or even contradictory. Liberals were frankly against democracy, because they believe it was incompatible with freedom and that it was even more important than freedom. (Kilcullen: 2000)

This shows a dichotomy between the two concepts. Notwithstanding, liberalism and democracy have all come to mean one and the same thing, thus the term liberal democracy (Satori, cited in Bo Li: What is constitutionalism), refers to the system of representative democracy as propagated in and followed by the West and Westernized systems across the World.

Today, however, liberal democracy has become a household name around the world including Africa. The classical notions about liberalism provided a suitable ground for the emergence and adopting of liberal democracy around the world. The word liberal democracy can be best described as a fuzzy word, given the multitude of its variants that are practiced elsewhere and in Africa. Furthermore, despite this problem of inconsistency in its philosophical foundation and basic premise, liberal democracy, both as a concept and a political system, has managed not only to survive but also to function effectively as a viable system of governance and administration.

The post-independence era saw a trial moment for Africans in terms of instituting governance systems. This was manifested by the fact that, newly independent states adopted several forms of governance systems at given periods of their statehood. However, one thing that was certain, was liberal democracy came to outplay any other form of governance system. Hence, many governments began to cast themselves from the shadows of other competing ideologies they bought into. However, if the embracing of liberal democracy in Africa was to salvage the failings of African governments, many have been disappointed.

Another factor was the position of the West in order for Africans to benefit from their aid and loans. It was widely lamented by the West, as espoused by World Bank policies, that Africa's underdevelopment and many other crises were because of lack of democracy and competitive markets in the continent. This impliedly shows that, it is democracy that can bring prosperity and glory to Africa. This resulted in a 'wild goose' chase by Africans to institute democratic governance (i.e. liberal democracy). This was described by Michael Huntington as the third wave of democratization.

These measures included the introduction of multipartyism, conduct of frequent elections, constitutional liberalism, and emphasis on rule of law, more economic liberalism and creation of political parties to provide for popular participation. All these measures are to usher in a renewed hope in the minds of Africans who have already or might be suffering at the hands of their incapable and in effective leaders.

In the light of the foregoing, the critiquing shall be examining how African governments delivered on such grandiose objectives that liberal democracy has promised. Against that background, I shall be looking at the processes and their ramifications to highlight the contradictions between the theory and the practice of liberal democracy and a subsequent discussion of its strengths and failures in Africa to propose, as already noted earlier, a possible alternative or solution that would address Africa's governance ills.

The twin ideals of popular participation and limited government are, in many African countries, under an increasing threat posed by the shellfish and irresponsible attitude of leaders across the continent.

Multipartyism as a fundamental tenet of liberal democracy aimed at providing that framework for popular participation saw a widespread institution in Africa in the 1990s amidst the demise of the Cold War. This liberal tenet reinforces the classical idea that power to make government and rule lies in the hands of the sovereigns. This is deemed to enable the populace hold their leaders accountable to the electorate. Therefore, multipartyism provides that room for public discourse capturing a myriad of opinions that are held by independent people. This marks a leap in the democratization process in Africa.

However, despite this perceived leap forward in Africa's democratic transition, multipartyism has not developed to a stage where all political groups agree to compete with one another on a level playing field (Oliver de Sardan, 2000). Parties are created to partake in elections to avail citizens the choice to elect their rulers. However, election exercises in fulfillment of this basic tenet of liberal democracies, most often in Africa, defeats its purpose. The rationale of elections, serving as a check on elected officials fails in many instances, where these officials in essence become so powerful because they are actually chosen by "hidden hands." This is manifested through governments personalizing state resources to influence election

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outcomes in their favour. However, it may be worth noting that this may not be a problem arcane to Africa alone, but many democracies around the world. Cassen and Clairmont, also expounded (cited in Kasongo,2005) that the holding of multiparty elections is nothing but an alibi aimed at qualifying them for the benefits of an already fowled individualistic system.

African governments in their bid to curry favour with the donor countries give-in to their conditionality, allowing for the West to plunder the crucial natural resources and African markets. Hence an election in Africa becomes qualifying criteria for accessing donor money which has so far failed to solve any of the continent's chronic governance problems. The economic and political situations are still fragile and too bad for the continent to regain the ground it has lost. Growth rates are still very low in many countries, poverty and corruption continued to be rampant and wide spread, national economies of the majority of countries are still fragile and therefore continue to be vulnerable to domestic and external shocks, domestic savings are very low, many countries continue still to depend to a large extent, on foreign products for their basic commodities. Thus elections have so far failed to address or resolve the problems of governance in Africa.

Instead, elections have become source of conflicts around Africa, as observed most recently in Kenya, Madagascar and almost Senegal in most recently and, earlier on in Ethiopia. Also political party support in Africa has always been galvanized along ethnic, tribal and regional lines. This serves as a potential source of flaring up violence. The Kenyan post election violence between the Kikuyu and the Luos and the Shona and Ndebele case in Zimbabwe are a clear manifestation of ethnically and regionally charged politics in Africa.

Election induced violence and political persecution are contributing factors for Africa's becoming the world biggest refugees generating continent. Thus today, more than ten million of the world's fourteen million displaced persons are from Africa (US State Department Website) Another limiting factor to the realization of the rationale behind liberal thinking about elections is the high illiteracy levels in Africa, where the majority of electorates constitute illiterates, as in West Africa where illiterates constitute about 60% of the populace (National Census of the Gambia - 2003) Therefore, they cannot understand the programmes of their

candidates. This simply suggest that they may be voting based on sentiments which does not help in making a rational and informed choice or decision.

The biggest problem of the electoral process is that the outcome does not truly reflect the will of the people and that it always leads to establishing elective dictatorships. According to the leader of the then Green Revolution in Libya, the electoral process always culminates in the victory of a candidate with only a simple majority i.e. about 51% of the total number of votes cast. This is a dictatorship established in the guise of a democratic process because the remaining 49% of the electorate who did not vote for the winning candidate would be governed by a government that they never like and never voted for but it is being imposed upon them. Al Gathafi pointed out in the Green Book another serious flaw in the electoral process. According to him the parliament as an arm of government instituted as a result of the electoral process is essentially established in the name of the people. Yet this underlying principle is in itself undemocratic since democracy means the power of the people and not power vested in elected members of parliament in the name of the people. (Al- Gathafi 2005- latest edition 2008)

Another fundamental tenet of liberal democracy is rule of law. Liberalism espouses the avoidance of governmental tyranny through a limited government. This is to ensure that life, liberty and individual properties are protected. However, these objectives remained a major challenge to African governments. Nevertheless, in the wake of the so called “third wave” of democratization, Africans have tried to mitigate such problems with the adoption of liberal constitutions. However, this attempt is stifled by the growing tendency for personal government i.e. monopolizing power by incumbents. Constitutional amendments, promulgation of draconian laws, and the hounding of the media are tactics employed by such leaders. Also, the economic liberalist policies that are promoted by the West through their agencies, the IMF and World Bank in the form of policies like the unpopular Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) then, and now the European Union’s Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and Bush’s Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) are all exploitative instruments of the West in disguise. Given Bush’s AGOA initiative, small countries like The Gambia, and other beneficiaries of the initiative, have little to profit from the venture. For instance in the Gambian case, where it is given a quota on all textile exports when, in fact,

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Gambia hardly exports textile or if any, it exports on a very minimal scale. Also, the catastrophic SAPs and the calls by the IMF and the World Bank for African countries to open up their markets all wreaked havoc on Africa's economies. And by implementing such policies, peoples' fundamental rights are curtailed. For instance, access to basic necessities such as health, education, electricity and water thereby contributing to lower levels of living.

The theory of economic liberalism advocates for individualism which runs counter to the collectivist mindset of Africans. Collectivism has provided a social security system for many Africans. The ramifications of such development led to the disintegration of families that were led by one bread winner in the wake of the SAPs.

Liberal democracy, like all other systems, has both strengths and weaknesses. Meanwhile, the liberal democracy enterprise in Africa has succeeded in providing citizens with the platform for the exercise of their political rights, which range from participating in elections to select their representatives to exercising choice in belonging to associations. It is a more desirable outcome to authoritarian regimes. In furtherance of the ideals of liberal democracy a good number of Sub Saharan Africa countries have enjoyed debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiatives (HIPC). Riding on the back of the strong commodities boom, African economies have been growing on average from 5-6%. Also on the continent people are freer now than they were under the brutal regimes of Mobutu Sese Seko of former Zaire and now Democratic Republic of Congo, Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Idi Amin of Uganda and Emperor Bokassa of Central African Republic (Ake: 1996).

Africans in their rush to embrace liberal democracy coupled with economic liberalism have failed to model it to mirror African realities. These realities, as indicated above, include poor infrastructure, poor communication networks, high rate of dependency and the cultural realities like the African social networks. Economic liberalism advocates for the withdrawal of the state from the activities of the market losing sight of the appalling poverty among Africans. Such withdrawals gave the hungry corporations the leeway to maximize profit on the back of widespread misery. Home to this argument is the flow of oil in the backyards of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, but yet its people continued to be condemned in

abject poverty. Congo may be Africa's richest resource wise but its people ranked among the world's poorest. All these could be attributed to the meddling into the governance arena by Multi National Corporations (MNC) with the blessing of their home governments. Governments that are sympathetic to this MNCs enjoy their support through funding of election campaigns, supply of arms to fight insurgencies. Where they do not enjoy such sympathy, they instigate insurgencies to avail them the opportunity to milk away their valuable natural resources. The liberal agenda has helped open up Africa to the advances of global capital. The exploitation of Africa's resources and access to its market could have been possible without the complicity of African governments (Ake: 1996).

VII. CONCLUSION

- **MAIN FINDING**

In the light of the above it is obvious that liberal democracy, regardless of whatever may be the reasons, has grossly failed to deliver the continent from its chronic leadership and economic crisis. Perhaps, liberal democracy is not the magic formula for Africa's developmental and governance agendas. Maybe this is the time for Africa to decide whether it should experiment the different democratic variations or other systems of governance or whether the real issues is change of attitudes and not systems.

- **WHAT IS THE REAL ISSUE?**

In my view, the real issue in the overall problems of governance in Africa is not the systemic aspect of it. In other words, the particular system of governing followed by one country or the other whether it is liberal democracy as the case is in most African countries or direct democracy as the case was in Libya, or Communism or absolute monarchy or military dictatorship as respectively witnessed in various countries across the continent, is not necessarily the cause of the political or

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leadership crisis which did not only hamper development and progress in virtually every African country but it also brought the state down and lead it to fail in Somalia in the Horn of Africa and Liberia and Sierra Leone in the Mano-river region of West Africa in the past. Consequently what is needed in Africa is change of attitude and not necessarily changes of systems. There are people who believe that for any governance process to be successful; it must introduce liberal democracy as a system which incorporates the good governance principles of transparency, accountability, decentralization of authority, civil society participation / promotion and protection of human rights and above all that the system must be adequately responsive to needs of the masses including the grass roots (Monder & Assif: 2004). Some governance and legal experts believe that these principles are not fully and adequately represented in many governance systems in Africa. Likewise, the Islamists across the continent world advocate for the introduction of Islamic rule and the Islamic system of government in those African countries with Muslim majorities. There is no doubt that the Islamic system of governance, which is backed by divine authority or the wholly Quran and the Sunnah or tradition of the prophet of Islam (peace be upon Him) and which is mainly characterized by administrative centralism could be a very good and viable alternative. The centralized nature of Islamic administration was typically demonstrated by the Ottoman Turks, who ruled the whole of the Islamic world under one strong central administration for about six centuries. (A.A. Senghore, PhD: 2011)

However, whether it is liberal or direct democracy or an Islamic system of governance or absolute or constitutional monarchy or authoritarianism or Communism or a hybrid of any two of these systems is followed by African countries, as witnessed in some instances, the political and leadership crisis will continue to exist if attitudes are not changed.

Africans must stop viewing or considering leadership as a privilege and a source of economic and political empowerment of few individuals. Rather they must acknowledge and accept the fact that leadership is a responsibility in the first and for most instances. They must realize the need for them as leaders to sacrifice for the progress and betterment of the masses, and be truly sensitive to the legacies they will leave behind. Thus, immoral practices like nepotism, favoritism, all sorts of discrimination, corruption, greed, selfishness, irresponsibility, autocracy and

the like must be completely eradicated from the political and governance arena throughout the length and breadth of the continent.

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