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Dynamics of Conflict and Democratization Project in Mali: Rethinking the Roles of the United Nations

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Abstract

Mali was noted to be a beacon of democracy in Africa prior to military coup that truncated the democracy and instill political instability in 2012. Since then, there has been almost steady collapse of the democratic ethos and institutions in the country. There has been several international interventions from African Union, Economic Community of West African States and the United Nations to restore political stability in Mali. More specifically, the United Nations through the establishment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by Security Council resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013. The MINUSMA was mandated to support political processes in Mali and carry out a number of security-related tasks. Therefore, this study examines the roles of the United Nations in Re-Democratization Project in Mali. This paper posits that issues such as endemic corruption, political alienation and socio-economic marginalization orchestrated the Malian crisis and consequent military incursion in 2012. It relies on frustration – aggression theory and descriptive research design with secondary sources of data for analysis. Arguably, the crisis has negatively impacted on the democratic process and tend to have caused reversal in democracy. The paper therefore recommends speedy restoration of democratic regime, practice of inclusive governance and infrastructural development as a pedestal for re-democratization in Mali

Keywords: Conflict, Democracy, Democratization process, political instability, United Nations

Introduction

The democratic experience that followed the third wave of democratization which resulted to transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic administration in most countries of Africa in the 1990s appear to have been tainted with conflicts. Such conflicts tend to jeopardize democratic consolidation. This goes to say that some African countries have been confronted with challenges of democratization due to conflicts.

For instance, the conflict in Mali which became rife since 2012 seems to have weakened the critical democratic institutions in the country. Since Mali gained independence from France in 1960, the government had to assert its authority on a large territory, including desert regions where Tuareg and Arab communities directly challenged its authority.

Incidentally, Mali is one of the West African countries engulfed in protracted political crisis within the last decade. The contemporary crisis in

Mali is traceable to January 2012 when Tuareg rebels, belonging to the *Movement national pour la libération d'Azawad* (MNLA), launched attacks on several cities in the north of the country. This follows a northern separatist rebellion led by members of the minority ethnic Tuareg community. Military officers seized power in early 2012. The political turmoil began with a 2012 coup, carried out by soldiers opposed to what they saw as a weak response to a growing separatist insurgency by Tuareg rebels in the country's north. The insurgents were armed with weapons flowing from nearby Libya following that country's 2011 civil war.

By mid-2012, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and two loosely aligned groups had outmaneuvered the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) to assert control over most of the northern Mali. Military officers overthrew President Toure in March. This necessitated the deployment of troops by African Union and French and government that enabled the Malian forces recapture much of the North which paved way for the Malian government and rebels to sign a peace agreement leading to elections in on June 18, 2013 and Keita was elected in the same year with a mandate to pursue peace talks.

Between 2014 and 2017, the people of Mali continued to experience multiple attacks by extremist groups and clashes between rebel factions and communal groups with 142,000 Malians still live as refugees in neighboring countries. In fact, the crisis in Mali has led to increased social and economic decay, ethnic tensions, and political

instability in the country. Living conditions in the Mali rapidly declined due to economic under-development, nepotism and corruption. Mali seems to have been going through a period of political turmoil characterized by atrocities, extensive human suffering, economic collapse, and massive destruction of the country's infrastructure (Raji, & Ayinde, 2021). To this end, the country seems to have gradually snowballed into seemingly unabated conflict situation.

As a result, since 2012, regional actors have been playing important roles to underpin the crisis and return the country to peace, stability and democracy. France intervened militarily against the Islamists in early 2013, as a result of which the MNLA and other factions re-asserted control in some areas. The attack of the MNLA in 2012 prompted the international consensus of the African Union and the United Nations launched a military intervention in Mali in response to the humanitarian and security crisis. Support was garnered for maintaining Mali's territorial sovereignty, defending human rights, reinforcing political stability, dismantling and eradicating terrorism, and successfully transitioning to a transparent and credible democratic administration (Bere 2017).

As the situation in Mali continued to get worse, more drastic measures to restore peace, law and order as well as democracy in the country became inevitable. This resulted to interventions of United Nations through the establishment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) by Security Council

resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013. The MINUSMA was mandated to support political processes in Mali and carry out a number of security-related tasks. The efforts have been to restore peace and order in Mali with a view to achieving a sustainable democratic rule. scholarly works from Ibeanu, (2007); Carothers, 2007; Nwanegbo & Alumona, (2011); Scholars such as Alesbury, (2013), Bruni, Koch, Siegel, & Strain (2017), Bertelsmann (2018), Farah, Gandhi & Robidoux, (2019), Norman (2020) and El-Abd, (2021) amongst others have separately examined some issues on United Nations and democratic consolidation. They have highlighted the various aspects of the subject matter and provided scholarly insights into conceptualizing and contextualizing the challenges of democratic consolidation.

Despite these efforts by United Nations, the situation in the country remains fragile, and continues to require vigorous support from the international community. This indicates that while the aggressive intervention of the international community has helped in addressing some of the problems, the nation is still experiencing political instability which threatens the survival of democracy in the country. The daunting challenges include strengthening democratic institutions and national security, as well as building an economy capable of alleviating poverty by creating jobs and providing basic social services that have remained inadequate in spite of various interventions. In fact, the situation in Mali remains fragile and democracy appears to have been constantly threatened by authoritarian forces. This paper therefore examines the dynamics of conflict and democratization project

in Mali: Rethinking the roles of the United Nations. It does so against the recurring political instability and declining democratic practice in the country.

Conceptualization of Conflict, Democracy and Democratization

Conflict is a violent stage which manifest in the form of aggression, struggle or war which is also an inevitable fact of life as long as people live together with different views, idea and thoughts which are opposed to one another. According to Action Aid (1994) a conflict situation is termed to be a condition of lack of cooperation between social entities or clashes between people who have incompatible ideas or thoughts. Karl Max (1910) in Lewis Coser (1962) assert that conflict leads to ever changing relations within existing social structure, but a total structure undergoes change through conflict. Conflict is also a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and sometimes perception which result in heated argument, physical abuses and definitely loss of lives, peace and harmony.

Schumpeter (1990, p.93) defined democracy as “an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide, by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote”. Essentially, it would be noted that in societies where democracy is close to ideal or even institutionalized, it tends to create conducive atmosphere for all, thereby ensuring collective and individual realization of dreams of a

better society that is based on equal opportunities for the people as well uplifts their standard of living. As Awa (1991) succinctly puts it, democracy must be made to deliver some economic empowerment and a higher state of living for the people. In fact, democracy is a demanding system, and not just a mechanical condition taken in isolation (Sen, 1999), getting these demands fulfilled marks the success of democracy or rather can be seen as a situation where democracy provides to the people the dividends that justifies its practice and acceptability. Inability of the system to provide the peoples' need is considered in every system as a failure.

Dahl (2000) sees democracy in the light of effective participation, equality in voting, gaining enlightened understanding, exercising final control over agenda and inclusion of adults. In the views of Nnoli (2003) democracy is a system of government usually involving freedom of individuals in various aspects of political life, equality among citizens and justice in the relations between the people and the government and the participation of the people in choosing those in government.

Appadorai (2004, p.137) explains democracy as the system, either of government under which the people exercise governmental power directly or through representatives periodically elected by them. He further states that "by this standard, a state could be termed democratic if it provides institutions for the expression and supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy". However, Nwanegbo &

Odigbo, (2012) are of the view that structural inadequacies, environmental and cultural imperatives inherent in recipient societies have continued to shape and reshape the principles and operations of democracy for adaptability. As a result and perhaps in their opinion some scholars in an effort to proffer a generally accepted definition tend to suggest attributes that qualifies a system of government as democratic (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2012).

In this regard, democracy is seen as a system of government in which laws, policies, leadership, and major undertakings of a state are directly or indirectly decided by the "people. It is a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system. The most basic idea in a democracy is that political power comes from the people and that government is legal when the governed consent (Genyi & Ortom, 2017). Democracy makes rulers become accountable and answerable to their people because it offers a platform for participation of citizens in the electing their leaders and regulating their activities. Sen (1999) explains that democracy is a system of government usually involving freedom of individuals in various aspects of political life, equality among citizens and justice in the relations between the people and the government.

In fact, beyond basic assumptions of democracy such as participation, transparency, equity, justice and periodic elections, etc., it is important to note that the functionality and success of

democratic practice is essentially determined by the ability of such democracy to provide the basic needs of the people (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2012). This critical component makes democracy people oriented. Thus, equality and freedom have both been identified as important characteristic of democracy since ancient times. These principles are reflected in all citizens being equal before the law and having equal access to legislative process. In representative democracy, every vote has equal weight. No unreasonable restriction can apply to anyone seeking to become a representative and the freedom of citizens is sauced by legitimized rights and liberties which are generally protected by a constitution.

In other words, democratisation, is the democratic transition to a more democratic political regime, including substantive political changes moving in a democratic direction. It entails the processes by which a society could progress from authoritarianism to minimalist democracy to substantive democracy, have never been linear, smooth and free of hazards. In this regard, Nwabueze (1993) conceives democratization as not just concerned with the form of government known as democracy nor being synonymous with multi-partyism, but as a process of experimentation during which certain basic conditions have to be put in place. Yahaya (2007) noted that democratization is both a procedural and institutional aspect of liberalizing a previously authoritarian political environment. It would consist of opening up a previously closed authoritarian political system and deepening and expanding of values thought to be necessary for the

entrenchment and sustenance of democracy. In essence, it is about the construction of a system that allows for the bulk of the populace to participate in the decision making process that has direct bearings upon their lives. This implies that democratization is a process that takes place over a period of time and that in the process of democratization, the state and the general populace are the major actors who must show commitment to the whole process of trying to allow democracy to take a strong hold of the entire society.

Theoretical anchorage- Frustration Aggression theory

The frustration aggression theory largely implies that aggression is often a result of frustration which occurs in the international system. As should be noted, the Frustration-Aggression Theory was propounded in 1939 at Yale University by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Scars. According to these Yale scholars, “the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise always lead to some form of aggression” (1939, p.13). The term frustration was defined as “an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal response at its proper time in the behavior sequence” (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Scars, 1939, p.7). Added to this, Newcome (1968) argued that, “frustration always induces motivation of some kind of aggression which acts as a drive or motive to react, combat or make attack” (cBreuer & Elson, 2017, p.7). In other words, the frustration-aggression theory states that **aggression is a result of frustration**. Frustration is any event or stimulus that prevents an

individual from attaining a goal and its accompanying reinforcement quality (Dollard & Miller, 1939). The theory assumes that human frustration may lead to aggressive behaviours and individuals become aggressive when there are obstacles (perceived and real) to their success in life. In other words, when one is frustrated, the only mean of survival becomes aggression.

However, the theory does not seem reasonable to assume that aggressive behavior of the usually recognized parties is always traceable to and produced by some form of frustration. Despite the perceived weakness, frustration aggression theory indicates that individuals and nations are allowed to show their grievance when they are frustrated in the international system. It is believed that the theory has created an enabling ground for equality in the interaction between Nations of international communities. It asserts that when one is frustrated, that the only mean of survival is aggression. As such, individual who is aggrieved can express his or her grievance overtly as well as covertly. The overt entails outward expression while covert is an inward expression. Citing Freud (1927), Johan (2010) posited that, "... aggression was a primordial reaction when the individual attempts to obtain pressure or avoid pain was blocked" (p.7).

Thus, relating this theory to the study, it is not hard for one to identify the crux of the matter. The Malian government (both colonial and postcolonial regimes) has failed its citizens, especially the northerners; Tuareg, Arab and Fulbe. Politically, the northerners have no value. As Chauzal and Damme (2015) confirmed, "Arabs

have been deeply marginalized by the Malian central power. Before the 2012 crisis, no Arab succeeded in being elected to the National Assembly or the High Council of Regional Authorities" (p.38). Economically, lack of developmental projects in the north compared to the south constitutes source of frustration. As Lecocq and Klute (2013), cited in Davis (2018) argued, "the rebellions expressed frustration with "the disproportionate development of southern versus northern Mali..." (p.4). Agricultural production and tourism have been the major source of revenue to the government of Mali. Regrettably, these sources of revenue which is the mainstay of the northern economy have not been developed by the Malian government.

As Davis (2018) posited, the Malian government... by not investing in agricultural production in Mali, effectively stifles the economy of the north, which is primarily Tuareg and Arab. Furthermore, the prohibition of tourism by the Malian government also helped engineer an economic crisis in the north. Consequently, the financial situation in Mali angers many Tuaregs and Arabs and further encourages them to join the growing number of anti-state militant groups... (p.4).

It is the response to the above stated political alienation and economic marginalization of the northerners that gave birth to aggression. The Islamist groups that left Libya due to the NATO bombardments returned with arms and overwhelmed Malian military in Timbuktu, Kano and Kidal and declared the northern regions as a Republic of Azawad. In addition, The Malian military was disappointed over the

manner their welfares were treated by the government of Mali. They were not well paid nor promoted and the necessary equipment and ammunition that could assist them in defeating the armed groups were not provided by the government. As International Crisis Group (2012) stated, “among the reasons for this frustration was the way that Amadou Toure promoted officers of his generation to the rank of general... and the perception... that close associates of the president were indulging in an unprecedented degree of corruption...” (p.18).

The frustration Malian army experienced while battling armed groups in the northern Mali, led to mutiny in Kati, a military camp near Bamako. According to Kimenyi, Adibe, Djire, Jirgi, Kergna, Deresse, Pugliese and Westbury (2014), “their mutiny transformed into coup d’état when, on March 22, 2012, the military rebels overthrew President Amadou Tormani Toure and instituted the National Committee for the Rectification of Democracy and Restoration of the State” (p.5). The overt attacks that involved armed groups invading military barracks and the subsequent coup d’état that led to the overthrow of former Malian President, Amadou Tourmani Toure can be seen as a direct attack at the source of frustration. The covert attack at the source of frustration include; raping, child soldiers, kidnapping and other crimes against humanity committed by the Islamist groups. The United Nations incorporated the promotion of democracy as a strategic component of conflict resolution in Mali.

Political instability in Mali and the Implications for Democracy

Mali is a country located in West Africa Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa. Mali is the eighth-largest country in Africa, with an area of over 1,240,000 square kilometres (480,000 sq mi). The population of Mali is 19.1 million. Its capital and largest city is Bamako. The sovereign state of Mali consists of eight regions and its borders on the north reach deep into the middle of the Sahara Desert. The country's southern part is in the Sudanian savanna, where the majority of inhabitants live, and both the Niger and Senegal rivers pass through. The country's economy centres on agriculture and mining. One of Mali's most prominent natural resources is gold, and the country is the third largest producer of gold on the African continent. Mali also produces and exports salt in large quantities.

In January 2012, an armed conflict broke out in northern Mali, in which Tuareg rebels took control of a territory in the north, and in April declared the secession of a new state, Azawad (Marchal, 2012). The conflict was complicated by a military coup that took place in March and later fighting between Tuareg and other rebel factions (Douglas-Bowers, 2013). In response to territorial gains, the French military launched Opération Serval in January 2013. A month later, Malian and French forces recaptured most of the north. Presidential elections were held on 28 July 2013, with a second-round run-off held on 11 August, and legislative elections were held on 24 November and 15 December 2013 (Global Conflict Tracker, 2019). The Mali crisis denotes a complex series of linked events and

dynamics that Mali has undergone since 2012. International actors such as AU, ECOWAS and United Nations have played important roles to resolve the crisis and return the country to peace, stability and democratic system of government.

The state of peace and democracy in Mali is fragile. Mali lost her democracy following the March 2012 coup d'état which resulted to political instability with all democratic institutions nearly collapsed in the face of a northern separatist rebellion led by members of the minority ethnic Tuareg community and a military coup. However, owing to international military intervention, Mali was able to hold elections in both 2013 and 2018. Notwithstanding, the Malian democracy has been fragile and shallow with allegations that the consensus politics of President Amadou Toumani Touré undermined the political opposition. The lack of commitment and follow-through with respect to decentralization illustrated the government's lack of concern for improving local governance and accountability. Corruption was rampant, and illicit trafficking in northern Mali was growing with worsening attitude of the political class seen as uninterested in addressing the poverty and insecurity that were daily fixtures for most Malians. The government failed to follow through on peace agreements in the north, and the implementation of the Special Program for Peace, Security, and Development in northern Mali.

The scenario led to economic frustration, political resentment and strategic opportunity taking, all of them rooted in the fragmented nature of the country. These factors contributed to

the resurgence of a Tuareg rebellion in January 2012. Separate statements and communiques issued by Economic Community of West African States, United Nations, European Union, African Union, they pleaded for the safety of President Amadou Toure and unconditional restoration of democratic regime. Aning, Okyere and Abdallah (2012). More specifically, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), a peacekeeping mission was created by the UN Security Council in July 2013 to help stabilize key population centers and support the re-establishment of state authority throughout Mali.

The aspirations of the North to develop culturally, socially, and economically, in terms of infrastructure, yet also in terms of political representation, have been ignored by the Malian authorities (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). After Mali achieved independence from the French, spontaneous revolts began in 1963 in the center of the country, and the response by the national army was cruel and discriminatory particularly towards the Tuareg, as a variety of restrictions were placed on them exclusively (Lode, 1997). With the government's distrust in the Tuaregs, the national military academy has historically been off-limits to Tuaregs, very few civil servants and diplomatic corps are Tuareg, and a limited number of ministers in government have been Arabs/Tuaregs (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). The nomads became a projecting marginalized group and felt "they were considered as second-class citizens (Chauzal & van Damme, 2015). The marginalization was protruding across

the Malian state, mainly due to alleged lack of proper representation.

The National Movement of Azawad formed in October of 2010 as a political movement that would demand autonomy in Mali through politics. After the demands of the movement were ignored, more people joined and formed the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad. Rather than requesting political autonomy and equity the way MNA had, MNLA declared that its purpose was to make Azawad an independent state, (Lecocq and Klute 2013). In January of 2012, the MNLA launched an attack in Menaka on a state military brigade (Chauzal and van Damme 2015). Furthermore, the prohibition of tourism by the Malian government also helped engineer an economic crisis in the north (Chauzal and van 2015).

In January 2012, several groups within Mali began an armed campaign against the Malian Government in aspiration for the independence of northern Mali, the area referred to as Azawad by many. Although Mali has taken the steps of formal peace agreements in attempts and with aspirations of settling peace and creating stability and security, the true validity of the peace processes lies in understanding, and subsequently solving the root causes of the violent conflict (Farah, Gandhi & Robidoux, 2019). This shows that the political instability in Mali began in 2012 between the northern and southern parts of Mali (Ghauzal & Van Damme, 2015). However, Farah, Gandhi and Robidoux, (2019) observes that the very multidimensional threats to Malian

democracy and national security can be observed as a result of cumulative continuous micro-conflicts since the 1960s after Malian independence.

It is instructive to note that prior to political instability in the country, Mali was lauded as one of Africa's stronger democracies at the time of the 2012 coup d'état, with Freedom House designating Mali as free (Farah, Gandhi & Robidoux, 2019). Incidentally, by 2013, that designation changed to not free, making Mali's one of the most dramatic drops in Freedom House's indexing history. In retrospect, it is clear that Malian democracy rested on a shaky foundation resulting from conflict and consequent political instability and subsequent occupation of the north by Islamic militants (Farah, Gandhi & Robidoux, 2019).

Before the coup, the prevailing sense was that elections in April 2012 would move forward as planned; they were expected to be peaceful and result in the second transition of power from one elected president to another. There were some concerns in Bamako that Touré would use his influence to alter the elections' outcomes. There was no clear front-runner in the presidential race, and many Malians were hopeful and open to the possibilities of electing someone new. Mali's constitution limited Touré's time in office as president to two five-year terms. Rumors had spread that perhaps Touré would seek to extend his stay in office, but these were never substantiated.

However, a referendum was planned for April 2012 that would include many changes to the constitution allegedly tilted towards consolidating the power of the president (Marchal, 2012). The planned

constitutional reforms, which had been created by the presidentially-appointed Diaba Diawara Commission and sailed through the National Assembly, heightened tensions in Bamako. Historically, Mali has incorporated dialogue and decentralization as building blocks of democracy. But the perceived weakening of these elements and the looming threat of centralization linked to the referendum fueled conflicts.

At the time of the March 2012 coup, many Malians were frustrated by the growing disconnect between the political elite and the population. Also the resurgence of a long-standing separatist rebellion in northern Mali, which destabilized Touré's administration contributed to the Military coup. The defeat of the Malian army in Aguelhoc in January 2012 and the government's evasive responses to questions about how many soldiers had been killed and what was being done to reinforce the army resulted in protests in Bamako and Kati in early February 2012, led by wives and families of those serving in the military, who demanded answers. The discontent with the government in conjunction with ongoing structural concerns contributed to widespread popular support for the coup. Many observers were surprised that a large segment of the population supported the junta and it's hastily created National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State (CNRDRE).

As a region whose economy is heavily dependent on livestock and agriculture, conditions were worse for northerners in Mali (Chauzal and van Damme 2015). This crisis motivated people in the north to migrate to other

nations where economic and living conditions might be better, but many soon returned because they were forced out due to worsening conditions in those other countries ((UN, 2018). By 2013 both the number of displaced people internally and externally had risen substantially from about 410,000 to 475,000 (UN, 2019). The causes of the 2012 resurgence of violence in Mali are linked to the continuous political corruption of Malian government officials and the growing influence of rebel groups insurgency in both the northern and southern regions of the country as well as the worsening economic conditions allegedly state-engineered (Chauzal and van Damme 2015).

The authority and legitimacy concerns of the Malian state are linked to this capacity trap, and it continues to be unable to provide security by itself. For the purpose of finding means to survival the nomads, along with many other Malians, have had to turn to illicit trade, organized crime, and terrorism (UN, 2018). These means feed back into the trap, making it even more difficult for the state to break the cycle and re-establish a social contract, creating a vicious feedback loop. The lack of state authority to enforce the legal measures and frameworks to manage illicit means, crime, and terrorism further decreases its state legitimacy and authority (Bruni, Kohn, Siegel & Strain, 2017). The situation has been worsened by the inability of the government to maintain the social contract and allowing the services to be handled by the parties who are beneficiaries of the conflict (Farah, Gandhi & Robidoux, 2019).

In Northern Mali, where the social contract has failed the most

significantly, the northern groups have taken it upon themselves to maintain this unreliability upon the state by providing the services (Dufka, 2017). In fact, a large number of Tuareg groups are heavily dependent on the militias for services and basic income (Morgan, 2012). Furthermore, the increased levels of inequality between individuals and households, such as income inequality and the inability to protect marginalized groups, increased the intensity of the violence between in-groups and between individuals (Bertelsmann, 2018).

The political instability in Mali which intensified in January 2012 when Tuareg ethnic rebellion in the north sets off massive displacement as people flee fighting. Military officers overthrow President Toure in March. Then in April, Tuareg rebels seize northern Mali and declare independence, calling the state Azawad. From June to July, other rebel groups seize territory and continue conflict in the north. Also, in November, the African Union deploys troops to quell violence in the north after more than 112,000 Malians have fled the violence as refugees to Burkina Faso, Mauritania, or Niger while at least 250,000 more residents are displaced within Mali. In January, 2013 French and Malian forces recapture much of the north. On May 15, international donors pledge more than \$4 billion to help Mali get back on its feet. The Malian government and rebels sign a peace agreement that prepares the way for elections in on June 18, 2013. In July, 12, 2013, 600-strong U.N. military and police force takes over to help stabilize the country. On Aug. 11, the Malian people peacefully elect Ibrahim Boubacar Keita as their new president in a runoff election. Before the coup,

Mali's democracy was considered a success story among West African nations.

Between 2014 and 2015 the political turmoil continues between the Mali government and militias in the north. The Mali government negotiates peace with militias and allows more regional autonomy for the Tuareg ethnic group in a peace deal aimed at ending years of civil conflict in the northern regions. Attacks by armed groups that are not parties to the 2015 peace agreement have increased since 2016. In 2017, the people of Mali continue to experience multiple attacks by extremist groups and clashes between rebel factions and communal groups with 142,000 Malians still live as refugees in neighboring countries. There was a lease of hope in 2018 when Ibrahim Boubacar Keita is re-elected president. Insecurity and terrorist attacks continue. More than 200,000 people were newly displaced in 2019 because of increasing conflict in the central and northern regions. An increase of insecurity and ethnic conflicts in Central Mali make some areas inaccessible to nongovernmental aid groups.

In a twist of events, President Keita resigned in 2020 and dissolved parliament following a military takeover. The international community and neighboring countries are concerned that increasing conflict could threaten regional stability. It is crucial to implement free and fair elections and completely remove junta leaders from governmental affairs. The government and the military in Mali are internally divided, constrained in the possible scope of their actions and lacking widespread support across the country. These constraints pose a challenge to

building sustainable peace and democracy in Mali.

United Nations operations and democratization in Mali

The UN as an institution has done more to support and strengthen democracy around the world than any other global organization. This ranges from fostering good governance to monitoring elections, from supporting civil society to strengthening democratic institutions and accountability to assisting the drafting of new constitutions in nations post-conflict. This brings home the fact that democracy is one of the universal and indivisible core values and principles of the United Nations.

Prior to the eruption of violent conflict, Mali was seen as a beckon of democracy for other countries in Africa to emulate. Regrettably, Chauzal and Damme (2015) lamented that: ...long standing distrust between different ethnic communities' economic frustration, political resentment and strategic opportunity taking, all of them rooted in the fragmented nature of the country. In this regard, Pringle, (2006) points out that Mali's record of democratisation is among the best in Africa even though the process continues to be difficult. The difficulties are attributable to some issues of concern that have to do with educated, urban Malians involvement in growing corruption and the slow pace of improvement in the education and judicial systems. Malians see the problem of unrest in the desert north and, more especially, the strife in Ivory Coast as greater threats to their new democracy than radical Islam (Pringle,

2006). Such challenges obviously require external interventions to address them.

The above is indicative that the United Nation's activities in support of democracy and governance have been instrumental to democratization in Mali. The UN's essential understanding of democracy is laid down in the UN Charter (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (particularly in Article 21); 'the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government' (UN Charter). There is a quite limited emphasis on free and fair elections from today's perspective. Democratic norms are also specified in core international human rights treaties, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), which lays down the conditions for the enjoyment of individual democratic freedoms.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), a product of the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, was a watershed event in the development of the UN's work on human rights and democracy and led to the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Reflecting the fall of the Communist bloc and also of military dictatorships in many developing countries, the international community is here invited to 'support the strengthening and promoting of democracy particularly in new and emerging democracies and countries in transition to democracy'(Foresti & Harris, 2011). This is, in reality, the basis for wider democracy assistance to be offered through the UN system as an aspect of its overall development aid.

According to Foresti and Harris (2011) in 2000, a first Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies was organised in Warsaw, leading to the Warsaw Declaration, eventually signed by 100 countries (2000). The declaration recognises that countries are at 'different stages' in their democratic development, and calls for exchange of experiences and best practices, with what seemed to be increased emphasis on the principle of non-interference in internal affairs (dialogue rather than 'finger pointing'). Probably because of democratic setbacks in some parts of the world during preceding decades (mostly overcome by the turn of the century), there is an emphasis on the principle of civilian and democratic control over the military and resistance to the overthrow of democratically elected governments.

A second conference of the same group, held in Seoul in 2002, adopted a more concrete plan of action. Another key document, adopted in 2000 by most heads of states and governments, is the Millennium Declaration. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have no concrete objectives in terms of democracy per se, the Millennium Declaration has much broader scope, emphasising the need to strengthen the capacity of all countries to implement the principles and practices of democracy and respect for human rights.

Towards the end of 2000, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a specific resolution on Promoting and Consolidating Democracy, which referred to the role of civil society and local communities in bringing government closer to the people, as well as enhancing social cohesion and

improving social protection systems (Foresti & Harris, 2011). This was probably a response to the increasing number of crises of legitimacy in fragile democracies as a consequence of the deepening social costs of macroeconomic programmes (e.g. in Latin America). It also established a clearer link between democracy and the MDGs.

United Nations has been playing a critical role for the growth and deepening of democracy in Africa. Most importantly is the United Nations commitment to restoration and maintenance of democratic governance in Africa. For instance, responses by UN to government attacks and repression toward the pro-democracy movement in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere especially during Arab spring, greatly aided in ensuring that some UN member states approached these situations, at least to some degree, within a legalistic paradigm (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2012). These efforts have resulted to the restoration of democratic governance in these States. Although, there seems to be democratic challenges in the aftermath of uprising in Libya, the UN has remained critical to the resolution of these challenges.

In a similar vein, the UN led to the actualization of the sovereign state of South Sudan through the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) which conducted the first phase of demobilization and reintegration programme. More recently, the former Gambia President Yaya Jammeh and incumbent Adama Barrow's saga in Gambia almost derailed democratic governance. Beyond these instances, the UN has continued to provide financial as well as technical assistance to African

Nations in a bid to ensure democratic consolidation in African states.

Impediments to the roles of the United Nations efforts in Democratic Consolidation in Mali

The peace-keeping and restoration of democracy mandates entrusted to the United Nations now often include both the restoration of democracy and the protection of human rights. United Nations departments, agencies and programmes have been called on to help States draft constitutions, create independent systems for the administration of justice, provide police forces that respect and enforce the rule of law, de-politicize military establishments, and establish national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights. Democratization process is primarily to establish in a society, a sustainable democracy to better improve the social and material existence and quality of living conditions of the people to ensure unlimited enjoyment of their rights. In other words, it is the process of establishing democratic principles and elements in a state which will provide the foundation of liberty and rule of law to the people. In African states, especially in Mali, there are several challenges that tend to undermine the United Nations efforts in democratic consolidation in Mali.

In the first instance, the public perception of the Malians towards democracy hinders democratic consolidation in the country. In this sense, Chauzal and Van Damme (2015) observes that the people of Mali need and desires of greater Malians is

education and poverty reduction. The people expected economic progress more compelling than anything else. He further points out that poverty and other issues seem to be threatening the efforts towards democratic consolidation in Mali (Chauzal & Van Damme 2015). There is little doubt that Malians hope that democratization will improve their standard of living, and that they believe it will eventually be judged a failure if it does not. Most of them agree that improved education and health care are the most critical quality of life issues, and that substantial progress on these issues will require economic growth.

More so, the continuous corruption of Malian government officials exacerbates hostilities between rebel groups and other citizens and the government. This prompts Chauzal and Van Damme (2015) to argue that political fraud seem to be common among government officials in Mali. This tends to hinder the efforts towards democratic consolidation championed by the United Nations. Due to political corruption, democracy failed in Mali after ten years under President Amadou Toumani Touré, (Chauzal & van Damme 2015). One reason for this failure is because of the allegations that the elections were often influential people with money bribing the citizens to vote for them. This created a situation where only the rich and powerful gained political influence over Mali, rather than through popular democratic elections.

The overall implication is that every United Nations peacekeeping operations are sometimes associated

with limitations and prospects and this is so because as the UN peacekeeping mission increases, the production of these operations remain a huge challenge (Dufka, 2017). The United Nations peacekeeping missions brings about the uniqueness of a highly specialized mechanism developed to assist nations that are faced with or have had disastrous conflict related issues and striving for perpetual peace, (Davies, 2016).

The government of Mali has been accused of failure to give equal political representation to all Malians in the political space. Electoral zoning laws were passed that discriminated against many groups Tuareg and Arabs. Tuareg communities that immediately supported the post-colonial Malian regime and were particularly violent against the aims of French colonization were rewarded through these electoral zoning laws (Chauzal & Van Damme 2015). Representation of less densely populated areas was increased, which drastically eliminated the Arabs in the north from having any political influence, but also favored some Tuareg groups over others. There appears to exist an intentional political exclusion of some groups of Tuareg and Arabs in the northern Mali.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is a known fact that political stability and country's development goes hand in hand. There are indications that political instability in Mali is derived from political exclusion of minorities and the contestation between the military and the civilian political elites allied

to France. The resulting dynamics of these are manifestations of the failure of governance which created a pool of mesmerized poor and unbearable unemployment that serve as catalyst for conflict. The implication of this scenario is that "dysfunctional politics" sign post by exclusion and fragmentation leads to bad governance and economic decadence as recipes for violence. This obviously accounted for the worsened trend in political instability in Mali.

The efforts of the UN to achieve democratization did not yield the desired results following military coups that took place in Mali. Several challenges such as biting poverty among the masses, youth unemployment and high-level illiteracy amongst others created uneasy relation between the MINUSMA and Malian authority, coupled with the fact that the interventionist force which hampered restoration of democracy in Mali. Thus, the situation where Malian government and United Nations interventionist forces were working at cross roads hindered the quest by the UN to achieve the desired democratization project in Mali. This paper therefore recommends that there is need to improve local governance and accountability in Mali to win the trust and confidence of all ethnic nationalities in the country so as to advance democratization.

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