

Military Rule and Women's Rights Violations in Africa

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Abstract

This paper examines the violations of women's rights under military rule in Africa through a feminist lens, specifically utilizing the framework of feminist theory of militarism. Drawing on feminist scholarship, the analysis underscores the gendered dimensions of authoritarianism and its detrimental effects on women's security, political participation, and human rights across the region. Central to this exploration is the critique of traditional power structures within military regimes, which prioritize militarized control and reinforce patriarchal oppression. The paper investigates how military rule intersects with other forms of social inequality, such as race, class, and ethnicity, deepening the marginalization of women and other vulnerable groups. It further examines the impact of militarized masculinities on gender relations, highlighting how the gendered dynamics of conflict contribute to widespread violence against women. Through this feminist perspective, the paper seeks to enhance understanding of women's rights violations under military rule in Africa and advocates for more inclusive, gender-sensitive approaches to governance and human rights protection that elevate the voices and experiences of women and marginalized communities.

Keywords: women's rights, military rule, gender inequality, human rights, violations.

Introduction

Military rule has been a persistent feature of African political landscapes, significantly shaping governance, societal structures, and the human rights landscape. Military regimes often emerge during periods of political instability, with military leaders seizing power under the pretext of restoring order or preventing state collapse. However, these regimes tend to centralise power, suppress opposition, and prioritise national security over individual freedoms. This political environment frequently leads to the erosion of democratic institutions, as military rulers operate with little to no accountability to civilian populations. Consequently, the protection of human rights, particularly women's rights, tends to be sidelined, creating environments rife with

violations and oppression (Crawford & Abdul-Gafaru, 2015). Women's rights, broadly defined as the entitlements and freedoms necessary for women to live with dignity, equality, and autonomy, are enshrined in various international treaties and regional frameworks such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Despite these protections, women in many African states have historically faced systemic gender discrimination, exacerbated by sociocultural norms and political instability. Women's rights violations include, but are not limited to, gender-based violence, restricted access to education, economic marginalisation, and limited political representation. These challenges are magnified under military rule, where authoritarian governance often suppresses advocacy for gender equality (Oloka-Onyango, 2016).

The violations of women's rights under military rule are particularly egregious due to the absence of legal and institutional checks on power. Military regimes often resort to violence and repression to maintain control, with women disproportionately bearing the brunt of these actions. Gender-based violence, including sexual assault, rape, and harassment, becomes a tool of intimidation and suppression used by the military to subdue dissent. Additionally, the militarisation of public life exacerbates the marginalisation of women by reinforcing patriarchal structures that exclude them from political decision-making and economic opportunities (Bachelet, 2019). Women's voices are further silenced through the curtailing of civil liberties, including freedoms of expression, assembly, and association. The nature of military rule, characterised by authoritarianism, militarism, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few, fosters a climate where women's rights are continuously undermined. Under military regimes, the prioritisation of national security often comes at the expense of individual freedoms, and women's issues are typically seen as secondary or irrelevant in the face of purported national emergencies. Moreover, the patriarchal tendencies inherent in many military structures place women at a distinct disadvantage, as military leadership predominantly consists of men who are unlikely to prioritise gender equality in policymaking or enforcement (Mama, 2017). Historically, African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have experienced military regimes notorious for their human rights abuses, particularly against women. For example, during Nigeria's military dictatorships between 1966 and 1999, women's rights activists faced brutal crackdowns as the regime sought to silence voices calling for reform. Similarly, in Uganda under Idi Amin's rule (1971-1979), women experienced heightened levels of sexual violence, forced marriages, and other abuses with little to no recourse for justice (Tripp, 2015). These instances highlight a recurring pattern where military governments perpetuate or even exacerbate existing gender inequalities through systemic violence and repression.

Case studies across Africa further illustrate the severity of women's rights violations under military rule. In the DRC, where the military has been implicated in widespread sexual violence, particularly during periods of conflict, women have faced severe violations of their bodily autonomy. In Zimbabwe, under Robert Mugabe's militarised rule, women's participation in political life was significantly curtailed, and those who protested were met with violence. These case studies offer critical insights into the ongoing struggles women face under authoritarian military regimes and underscore the urgent need for legal and institutional reforms that can protect and promote women's rights even in unstable political environments (Snyder et al., 2017). Despite international and regional efforts to address these violations, significant gaps remain in the protection of women's rights under military rule. The lack of enforcement mechanisms for international treaties, weak judicial systems, and the limited capacity of civil society to hold military regimes accountable contribute to the persistence of these violations. Furthermore, post-2015 studies reveal that while some African states have transitioned to democratic governance, the legacies of military rule continue to hinder the full realisation of women's rights. This underscores the need for ongoing research and advocacy to close these gaps and ensure that women in Africa can enjoy their full rights regardless of the political context (Bertocchi & Guerzoni, 2019). The issue of women's rights violations under military rule in Africa remains a pressing concern. Although progress has been made in addressing gender inequality on the continent, the intersection of military governance and gender-based

oppression continues to pose significant challenges. By exploring historical and contemporary case studies, as well as examining the gaps in legal and institutional protections for women, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge advocating for women's rights in Africa. Further research is needed to understand how the legacies of military rule can be addressed and how women's rights can be effectively safeguarded in future political transitions.

Conceptual Clarification

Military Rule

Military rule refers to a form of governance in which the military, rather than civilian authorities, controls the state apparatus. It often emerges during times of political instability or as a response to perceived government inefficiencies or threats to national security. Under military rule, power is usually concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small group of military officers, and civil liberties are frequently curtailed (Oloka-Onyango, 2016). This form of governance is characterised by authoritarian practices, suppression of dissent, and a focus on maintaining control through force. The absence of democratic institutions under military rule leaves citizens, particularly vulnerable groups like women, with limited avenues for seeking redress or advocating for their rights. Military regimes in Africa have often led to widespread human rights abuses, particularly in relation to women's rights. Women's rights encompass a range of issues, including protection from violence, access to education, equal employment opportunities, and political participation. Under military rule, however, these rights are often severely restricted, with women facing increased levels of gender-based violence, economic exclusion, and political disenfranchisement. The militarisation of society also tends to reinforce patriarchal structures, further marginalising women (Bertocchi & Guerzoni, 2019).

One of the most notorious examples of women's rights violations under military rule occurred in Uganda during Idi Amin's regime (1971–1979). Amin's regime was marked by extreme brutality, with women facing heightened levels of sexual violence, forced marriages, and killings. Amin's military forces used rape as a weapon of terror, and women, particularly those from politically marginalised groups, were frequently targeted (Tripp, 2015). The lack of accountability for these violations, combined with the overall atmosphere of fear and repression, created a hostile environment where women were unable to seek justice or protection.

In Nigeria, military rule from 1966 to 1999 also resulted in significant violations of women's rights. Women were largely excluded from political participation, and the military's focus on maintaining control led to the suppression of civil liberties, including the rights of women to protest or advocate for gender equality. The annulment of the 1993 elections and subsequent military regimes were particularly repressive, with women's rights activists often facing detention, harassment, and violence (Mama, 2017). This era saw widespread economic disenfranchisement, particularly for women, as military regimes failed to implement policies that addressed the gendered nature of poverty.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) provides another stark example. During periods of military rule and ongoing conflict, the DRC has been plagued by systematic sexual violence, with women and girls bearing the brunt of the conflict. Military forces, as well as rebel groups with military support, have been implicated in using sexual violence as a strategy of war, leaving survivors with little to no access to justice or reparations (Bachelet, 2019). These violations reflect broader trends of women's rights abuses under military rule, where law and order are subordinate to the military's objectives, and women's rights become secondary concerns.

In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe's authoritarian rule, heavily backed by the military, similarly restricted women's rights. The government employed military tactics to suppress political opposition, and women activists were often targeted for their involvement in anti-government protests. Reports of sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and harassment against women activists were widespread, particularly during election periods (Bertocchi & Guerzoni, 2019). The militarisation of public life in Zimbabwe created a culture of fear, where women's rights were systematically violated without recourse to legal protections.

The military's role in African governance has often had devastating consequences for

women's rights. From Uganda and Nigeria to the DRC and Zimbabwe, military regimes have consistently prioritised national security over individual freedoms, leading to widespread violations of women's rights. These regimes create environments of impunity where gender-based violence, political exclusion, and economic marginalisation are rampant. Women's rights activists continue to face significant challenges in advocating for gender equality in these militarised contexts, pointing to the urgent need for reforms and international accountability mechanisms that can protect women's rights under all forms of governance.

Women's Right

Women's rights refer to the entitlements and freedoms that enable women to live with dignity, equality, and autonomy in both private and public spheres. These rights include protection from discrimination, access to education and healthcare, economic participation, and freedom from violence, among other civil, political, and socio-economic rights. Women's rights are enshrined in various international and regional frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Maputo Protocol), which obligate signatory states to protect and promote the rights of women. However, despite these legal provisions, women in many African countries continue to experience systemic gender-based violence, economic disenfranchisement, and limited political participation, particularly under military rule (Bachelet, 2019). The violation of women's rights by the military is a serious issue across the African continent, where military regimes and conflicts have created conditions for widespread abuse. Under military rule, women's rights are often sidelined in favour of maintaining control, and authoritarian practices enable gender-based violence and oppression. The militarisation of governance typically reinforces patriarchal structures, further restricting women's access to justice and social participation (Mama, 2017).

One of the most widely cited examples of women's rights violations under military control is the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The DRC has experienced prolonged conflict, with military forces and rebel groups both implicated in the systematic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. According to Bachelet (2019), women in conflict zones across the DRC are subjected to rape, sexual slavery, and other forms of violence, often perpetrated by members of the military. The state's inability to hold perpetrators accountable has further entrenched a culture of impunity, with women receiving little to no support for rehabilitation or justice.

Another case that illustrates military abuse of women's rights is Nigeria during periods of military rule, particularly between 1966 and 1999. Women's voices were largely excluded from political participation, and those who attempted to advocate for women's rights faced significant repression. For instance, under General Sani Abacha's regime, women who participated in protests were often detained or violently dispersed. Moreover, military rule reinforced patriarchal norms that curtailed women's roles in decision-making and restricted their access to social services and economic opportunities (Oloka-Onyango, 2016). This period saw widespread gender-based violence, and women were disproportionately affected by poverty due to military neglect of social welfare programmes.

In Zimbabwe, under Robert Mugabe's regime, which heavily relied on military backing, women's rights were similarly violated. Military forces were employed to suppress political opposition, and women activists were often targeted for harassment, arbitrary detention, and sexual violence. During the 2008 elections, the military was involved in violent crackdowns on opposition supporters, and women reported widespread sexual violence and intimidation. Mugabe's militarised rule entrenched a system where women's voices were marginalised, and those advocating for rights were met with repression (Bertocchi & Guerzoni, 2019).

Uganda under Idi Amin (1971–1979) is another notable example. Women experienced severe repression, with military forces committing acts of sexual violence, forced marriages, and murder. The lack of accountability and the reign of terror that characterised Amin's rule left women particularly vulnerable to abuse. Women's rights activists faced violence, and their ability to

advocate for gender equality was severely limited in a militarised political environment (Tripp, 2015). This period in Uganda's history is a stark reminder of the dangers of unchecked military power, particularly for marginalised groups such as women.

In Sudan, during the decades of military conflict, women have also faced significant rights violations. The military's involvement in civil conflicts, particularly in Darfur, has resulted in widespread sexual violence against women. Human Rights Watch (2018) reports that women in conflict zones are often targeted for rape and other forms of sexual violence by both government forces and rebel groups. Despite international outcry, these violations persist, with little accountability for the perpetrators. The militarisation of Sudanese society has reinforced gendered inequalities, making it difficult for women to seek justice or advocate for their rights.

In Africa, women's rights continue to be violated under military regimes and in conflict situations involving military actors. Despite international and regional legal frameworks designed to protect women, military rule and conflict create conditions for systematic violations of women's rights, including sexual violence, political marginalisation, and economic exclusion. The case studies of the DRC, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Sudan highlight the urgent need for reforms to address the impunity surrounding these violations and to promote women's rights even in militarised contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory of Militarism

The paper adopts the feminist theory of militarism as it provided insights and depth into the subject of discourse. This theory is grounded in the analysis of gender inequalities, focusing on the ways in which patriarchal structures perpetuate the subjugation of women in various social, political, and economic contexts. Feminist theory offers critical insights into the gendered nature of military regimes and their impact on women's rights, providing a robust framework for analysing both historical and contemporary violations of women's rights under authoritarian rule. Feminist theory emerged in the mid-19th century during the first wave of feminism, which focused on legal inequalities such as women's suffrage and property rights. However, it was in the mid-20th century, particularly during the second wave of feminism (1960s-1980s), that feminist theory expanded to include broader critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, and other systemic forms of oppression (Tong & Botts, 2018). Leading feminist scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), and Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), explored how social structures and cultural norms contribute to the marginalisation of women. The expansion of feminist theory into the realm of international human rights and gender-based violence, particularly during conflicts, was influenced by scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, who focused on the militarisation of women's bodies, and Judith Butler, who interrogated how gender identity is constructed in political contexts (Enloe, 2017). These scholars illuminated how militarism and authoritarian rule exploit patriarchal systems to suppress women's rights and how women's bodies are often used as instruments of war and domination.

Feminist theory is particularly relevant to the study of women's rights violations under military rule because it highlights the intersection of gender and power in authoritarian regimes. Military rule is inherently patriarchal, relying on hierarchical power structures that privilege male dominance and suppress dissent, including that of women. Feminist theory argues that military regimes often exacerbate existing gender inequalities, as women are systematically excluded from political power, and their rights are subordinated to the interests of the state and military elite (Bachelet, 2019).

For instance, feminist theory can explain why military regimes often employ sexual violence as a tool of war, as seen in conflicts like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the military and armed groups use rape and sexual assault to terrorise communities and enforce control (Snyder et al., 2017). The theory also sheds light on how women's political exclusion under military rule, such as in Nigeria during the military regimes of 1966-1999, leads to the silencing of their voices and the reinforcement of patriarchal governance structures (Mama, 2017).

Feminist theory is applicable to understanding the widespread use of sexual violence by the military and armed groups during the conflict in the DRC. Feminist scholars argue that the militarisation of society and the objectification of women's bodies are central to the strategies of war used by both state and non-state actors (Snyder et al., 2017). The Ugandan military dictatorship under Idi Amin saw widespread violations of women's rights, including forced marriages and sexual exploitation by soldiers. Feminist theory explains these abuses as manifestations of patriarchal power, where women's bodies are treated as instruments of male dominance and state control (Tripp, 2015). During the prolonged period of military rule in Nigeria, women's political and social rights were systematically violated, as military leaders focused on consolidating power and maintaining control. Feminist theory helps explain how women were marginalised from political discourse and how the military regime reinforced patriarchal structures that denied women leadership opportunities (Mama, 2017).

While feminist theory provides critical insights into the nature of women's rights violations, it has faced criticism for its sometimes narrow focus on gender to the exclusion of other intersecting factors, such as race, class, and ethnicity. Critics from post-colonial and intersectional feminist perspectives argue that early feminist theory was primarily centred on the experiences of Western, middle-class women, failing to account for the diverse experiences of women in Africa and other non-Western societies (Mohanty, 2015). Intersectional feminist scholars, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasise the need to understand how different forms of oppression—such as gender, race, and class—interact to shape the experiences of marginalised women (Crenshaw, 2017). Moreover, some critics argue that feminist theory does not always adequately address the complexities of military rule and armed conflict, particularly in relation to the roles that women themselves sometimes play within these regimes. While feminist theory tends to portray women as victims of patriarchal structures, some scholars contend that women can also be agents within military systems, including as soldiers, informants, or supporters of authoritarian regimes (Enloe, 2017).

Women's Rights Violations Under Military Rule

Women's rights encompass a wide range of fundamental human rights, including the right to equality, protection from violence, access to education, political participation, and economic opportunities. Despite international treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and regional frameworks like the Maputo Protocol, women's rights in Africa remain severely compromised under military rule. Military regimes, known for authoritarianism and suppression of civil liberties, often exacerbate the pre-existing gender inequalities, using violence, intimidation, and political marginalisation as tools of control. The absence of strong legal and institutional mechanisms under military rule further enables systematic violations of women's rights (Oloka-Onyango, 2016).

Evidence of Women's Rights Violations in Africa under Military Rule

Military rule in Africa has a history of perpetuating violence and oppression against women. This is evident in the use of sexual violence as a tool of war, restrictions on women's political participation, and the socio-economic marginalisation of women. The authoritarian nature of military regimes makes it difficult for women to advocate for their rights or seek justice for the violations they face. Women's voices are often excluded from political discourse, and the militarisation of governance reinforces patriarchal structures, further marginalising women from decision-making and leadership roles (Bachelet, 2019).

One of the most prominent examples of women's rights violations under military rule is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The military, as well as armed rebel groups, have been implicated in the systematic use of sexual violence against women during the country's prolonged conflict. Rape and sexual slavery are frequently employed as weapons of war, with thousands of women subjected to horrific abuse. The military's involvement in these acts, coupled with the state's failure to provide justice for victims, has created a culture of impunity. Women in conflict zones are particularly vulnerable, with limited access to legal recourse or social

support (Snyder et al., 2017). Despite international condemnation, the violations persist, highlighting the need for stronger accountability mechanisms. During Nigeria's extended period of military rule, women's rights were systematically violated through political exclusion, economic marginalisation, and gender-based violence. Under General Sani Abacha's regime, for instance, women who participated in protests or activism were often met with brutal repression, including arrests, harassment, and violence. Military rule reinforced the patriarchal structures that restricted women's access to leadership roles and silenced their voices in political discourse (Mama, 2017). Additionally, the focus on military control over social development meant that women's economic and social rights, such as access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, were severely compromised.

The military dictatorship of Idi Amin in Uganda was notorious for widespread human rights abuses, including significant violations of women's rights. Women were subjected to forced marriages, sexual violence, and arbitrary killings by military forces. Amin's regime used violence to suppress opposition and maintain control, and women were often targeted as part of this strategy. The lack of legal protections or accountability for these abuses further exacerbated the vulnerability of women during this period (Tripp, 2015). Uganda's history under military rule remains a potent reminder of how authoritarian regimes can exploit women's bodies and rights as instruments of terror and control. Although Zimbabwe was not under direct military rule for much of Robert Mugabe's tenure, his regime was heavily supported by the military, and women's rights were severely curtailed. Women activists and opposition supporters were often subjected to harassment, sexual violence, and arbitrary detention, particularly during times of political unrest. During the 2008 elections, women faced systematic violence from military and security forces, which were deployed to suppress dissent and maintain Mugabe's hold on power. These violations were part of a broader pattern of political repression that marginalised women and excluded them from the political process (Bertocchi & Guerzoni, 2019).

In Sudan, the military's involvement in the civil conflict in Darfur has led to widespread sexual violence against women. Military and paramilitary forces, along with rebel groups, have used rape and sexual assault as weapons of war to terrorise communities and displace populations. Human Rights Watch (2018) reports that women in conflict areas, especially in Darfur, are frequently subjected to sexual violence, with little to no access to justice. The militarisation of Sudanese society has created a culture of impunity for these violations, further entrenching gender inequality.

Women's rights violations under military rule in Africa present a complex challenge, deeply rooted in the intersection of gender, power, and violence. Military regimes have consistently failed to protect women's rights, instead perpetuating systemic violations through sexual violence, political repression, and economic marginalisation. The case studies of the DRC, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Sudan highlight the severe impact of military rule on women, revealing the urgent need for comprehensive reforms that prioritise gender equality and justice for victims of military abuses.

Nature of Military Rule

Military rule refers to a form of governance in which the military directly controls the state's apparatus, often following a coup d'état or during periods of political instability. This governance style typically suspends civilian rule, concentrating power in the hands of a military leader or junta. Military rule is characterised by authoritarianism, limited political freedoms, and the subjugation of civilian institutions to the military hierarchy (Oloka-Onyango, 2016). In many cases, constitutions are suspended, parliaments dissolved, and political opposition silenced, with the military assuming responsibility for lawmaking, judiciary oversight, and executive functions. One of the defining features of military rule is the centralisation of power. Military regimes often justify their actions on the grounds of restoring order or protecting the nation from internal or external threats. This centralisation of authority typically leads to the suppression of democratic institutions, such as elections, the judiciary, and the press, which are either severely restricted or entirely controlled by the military (Cheeseman & Fisher, 2019).

The military also tends to invoke the need for national security to suppress political dissent and consolidate its grip on power, often at the expense of civil liberties and human rights.

Furthermore, military regimes are often marked by a rigid hierarchical structure, reflective of the command-and-control nature of military institutions. This hierarchical order translates into a top-down approach to governance, where decisions are made by a few senior officers and imposed on the broader populace. The lack of consultation and inclusiveness in decision-making processes often leads to the exclusion of civilian voices, particularly marginalised groups such as women and ethnic minorities (Fombad, 2017). Under military rule, governance tends to become highly repressive, as opposition is viewed as a threat to national stability and unity. The economic policies under military regimes are also indicative of their nature. Economic decisions are frequently geared towards maintaining control and loyalty within the military ranks rather than promoting inclusive development. For instance, military rulers often allocate significant portions of national budgets to defence spending while neglecting social services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. This misallocation of resources can result in economic stagnation, increased poverty, and social discontent (Adebajo, 2018). Additionally, corruption tends to flourish under military rule, as unchecked power enables military leaders to divert state resources for personal gain.

The repressive nature of military rule is also reflected in the restriction of civil liberties. Freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press are often curtailed, and citizens are subject to strict surveillance. Critics of the regime, including journalists, activists, and opposition leaders, are frequently detained, harassed, or disappeared (Bach, 2017). The judiciary, which under civilian rule acts as a check on executive power, is typically weakened or co-opted by the military, further limiting avenues for redress and justice. Military regimes often invoke martial law or states of emergency to justify these repressive measures, claiming they are necessary to maintain national security.

Moreover, military rule is often accompanied by a militarisation of society, where the values and norms of military institutions permeate civilian life. The glorification of discipline, loyalty, and obedience to authority becomes entrenched, leading to the suppression of democratic values such as pluralism, dialogue, and participation. This militarisation can have long-term impacts on governance, even after the military formally relinquishes power, as authoritarian practices and mindsets can persist within state institutions and the broader society (Cheeseman & Fisher, 2019).

The nature of military rule is characterised by authoritarianism, centralised decision-making, suppression of civil liberties, economic mismanagement, and societal militarisation. While military regimes often justify their control as a means of restoring stability, their governance style tends to exacerbate political repression and hinder democratic development. The legacy of military rule in Africa, and elsewhere, has shown that military governance often leads to prolonged periods of instability, underdevelopment, and human rights abuses.

Historical Violations of Women's Rights in Africa

The historical context of women's rights violations in Africa reveals a complex interplay of colonial legacies, traditional practices, and socio-political dynamics that have collectively contributed to the marginalisation and abuse of women. Historical injustices against women in Africa have often been exacerbated by both colonial and post-colonial governance structures, which frequently disregarded or undermined women's rights and status within society (Akinola, 2018).

◆ Colonial Impact on Women's Rights

During the colonial era, African women faced significant violations of their rights due to the imposition of foreign governance systems that often disregarded or replaced existing local customs and laws. Colonial administrators and settlers frequently imposed patriarchal legal systems that reinforced gender inequalities, such as the exclusion of women from property ownership and political participation. For instance, in many

British colonies, traditional practices that afforded women certain rights were replaced by colonial laws that restricted their rights and further entrenched gender discrimination (Mamdani, 2016). The legacy of these discriminatory practices has persisted in many African countries, where colonial legal systems have had lasting impacts on women's rights.

◆ **Post-Colonial Challenges**

Following independence, many African nations continued to grapple with the legacy of colonialism, which often included the perpetuation of gender inequalities. Post-colonial governments, in their efforts to consolidate power and modernise, frequently neglected gender issues, resulting in continued marginalisation of women. For example, in Nigeria, despite the end of British colonial rule, women continued to face systemic discrimination in areas such as education, employment, and political participation. The political instability and corruption of post-colonial regimes often diverted attention from gender equality initiatives, leaving women vulnerable to violence and discrimination (Mama, 2017).

◆ **Military Rule and Women's Rights**

Military regimes in Africa have been particularly notorious for their violations of women's rights. The concentration of power within military structures typically leads to the suppression of civil liberties, including the rights of women. Under military rule, women's rights are often disregarded in favour of maintaining control and order. For instance, during Idi Amin's regime in Uganda (1971–1979), women faced severe human rights abuses, including forced marriages and sexual violence, as the military used violence to suppress dissent and consolidate power (Tripp, 2015). Similarly, in Nigeria, military regimes from 1966 to 1999 were marked by widespread abuses of women's rights, including political exclusion and economic marginalisation (Oloka-Onyango, 2016).

◆ **Gender-Based Violence in Conflict Zones**

Conflict and war have also historically exacerbated women's rights violations in Africa. Armed conflicts often result in heightened levels of gender-based violence, with women being disproportionately affected. The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war has been a recurrent theme in many African conflicts. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, sexual violence against women has been systematically employed by both state and non-state actors as a means of terrorising communities and destabilising regions (Snyder et al., 2017). The enduring nature of these abuses reflects the intersection of gender and conflict, where women's rights are often sacrificed in the pursuit of military objectives.

◆ **Traditional Practices and Gender Inequality**

In addition to external and political factors, traditional practices have historically contributed to the violation of women's rights in Africa. Practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriages, and honour-based violence have been deeply rooted in some African societies, often justified by cultural or religious beliefs. These practices have historically undermined women's health, autonomy, and dignity. Efforts to address these violations have often been hindered by the persistence of traditional norms and the lack of legal frameworks to protect women's rights (Shell-Duncan & Hernlund, 2018). Despite increasing advocacy and legal reforms, traditional practices continue to pose significant challenges to gender equality in many communities.

The historical violations of women's rights in Africa reflect a complex legacy of colonialism, post-colonial governance failures, military repression, conflict-related violence, and entrenched traditional practices. These historical injustices have collectively contributed to the systemic marginalisation and abuse of women across the continent. Addressing these violations requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges historical contexts while promoting comprehensive legal, social, and political reforms to safeguard women's rights and promote gender equality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of military rule and women's rights violations in Africa reveals a complex interplay between authoritarian governance and entrenched patriarchal structures. Military regimes, characterised by the centralisation of power, authoritarian control, and suppression of civil liberties, exacerbate gender inequalities by systematically excluding women from political processes and subjecting them to various forms of violence and discrimination. Feminist theory, with its focus on the gendered nature of power relations, provides a valuable framework for understanding how military rule disproportionately impacts women through political marginalisation, economic disenfranchisement, and the use of sexual violence as a tool of control. The militarisation of society under authoritarian regimes further perpetuates patriarchal values, reinforcing the subjugation of women.

Case studies, such as Uganda under Idi Amin, the Democratic Republic of Congo during armed conflict, and Nigeria's prolonged military rule, provide concrete evidence of the systematic violations of women's rights under military regimes. These regimes have often used their control over the state to perpetuate patriarchal norms, disregarding women's political and social rights while fostering environments in which gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence, is widespread. Feminist scholars have shown that these abuses are not incidental but are often strategically employed to maintain power and suppress dissent, reflecting the inherent patriarchal nature of military governance. However, despite the critical insights offered by feminist theory, it is essential to recognise its limitations. Critics, particularly from post-colonial and intersectional feminist perspectives, argue that early feminist theory did not adequately account for the diverse experiences of African women, whose lives are shaped by multiple, intersecting oppressions such as race, class, and ethnicity. While feminist theory remains a powerful tool for understanding women's rights violations under military rule, a more nuanced approach that considers the intersectionality of these experiences is necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the gendered impacts of military regimes in Africa.

Recommendations

To address the persistent violations of women's rights under military rule in Africa, several key recommendations can be put forward:

African governments should strengthen national and regional legal frameworks that protect women's rights, ensuring that they are enforced during periods of political instability or military governance. International bodies like the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) should be more proactive in holding military regimes accountable for gender-based human rights violations, ensuring that such regimes adhere to international conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Additionally, post-conflict legal reforms should prioritise gender-sensitive policies that promote women's political participation and safeguard their rights. Furthermore, civil society organisations and advocacy groups should prioritise public education and awareness campaigns that challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality. Increased awareness about women's rights among both men and women can help reduce gender-based violence and empower women to participate in political and social spheres, even under repressive regimes. Furthermore, providing educational opportunities for women, particularly in areas affected by conflict, is essential for fostering long-term gender equality and reducing the systemic marginalisation of women under authoritarian rule.

Conclusively, women's involvement in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction efforts is crucial for ensuring that gender-sensitive issues are addressed in the transition from military rule to democratic governance. International organisations and local governments must prioritise the inclusion of women in peace negotiations, post-conflict political processes, and governance structures. This approach not only empowers women but also ensures that the rebuilding of societies after military rule considers and addresses the specific needs and rights of women. The inclusion of women in these processes has been shown to lead to more sustainable peace agreements and more equitable political systems.

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