Number 2 - The Role of Western Democratic System of Governance in Exacerbating Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: The Case of Ghana's Democratic Dispensation, 1992-2012

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The Role of Western Democratic System of Governance in Exacerbating Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: The Case of Ghana’s Democratic Dispensation, 1992-2012

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The Role of Western Democratic System of Governance in Exacerbating Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: The Case of Ghana’s Democratic Dispensation, 1992-2012

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This paper interrogates the influence of Western forms of democracy on ethnic conflicts in Africa through a case study of Ghana’s adoption of multiparty democracy between 1992 and 2012. It discusses the transition of African traditional systems of government before, during, and after colonization. The paper also shows how democracy, by definition and in terms of governance, cannot solely be a Western idea since many African societies had democratic elements in their systems of government before the arrival of the Europeans. Relying on qualitative secondary data, and the analysis of fierce and acrimonious competition that have characterized multiparty democratic elections in post-independence Ghana as case study, the paper inquires if there is any relationship between ethnic rivalries and conflicts in many African states and the Western-style democratic system.

Keywords: Western, Democratic system, Governance, Ethnic conflict, Democratic dispensation, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that democratic system of governance is a Western imposition on African states (Fukuyama, 1989; and Nwauwa, 2003). Prior to the partition of Africa, many parts of the continent had empires. While these empires were governed by traditional rulers based on the concept of kingship, other smaller groupings had their unique system of governance without chiefs or kings as their rulers (Uchendu, 1965). Both centralized and acephalous societies had ethnic and clan divisions, which evolved functional conflict management strategies. This made the incidence of deadly conflicts a rare phenomenon, particularly when compared to the rampant and bloody conflicts that has been visible in the postcolonial African states, as those conflict management strategies enabled those precolonial societies to prevent disputes and conflicts from degenerating into violence. To many, in addition to the arbitrary partitioning of the African continent without recourse to language, ethnicity, culture and religion, the imposition of Western forms of democracy is at the heart of most of the deadly conflicts that have been, and are being, fought in Africa (Ayittey, 1998; Boahen, 1989; Fukuyama, 1989; Parsons, 2010; and Williams, 2011).

Using Ghana’s democratic dispensation between 1992 and 2012 as a case study, this paper assesses the extent to which Western forms of democracy have contributed to the exacerbation of ethnic conflicts in Africa. The reason for choosing Ghana lies in the fact that the period 1992 to 2012 (i.e., twenty years) represents the longest period of Ghana’s attempt at democracy without interruption since her independence from British colonial rule in 1957. The
paper specifically poses the question: To what extent does Western democratic system of governance help to explain or account for ethnic-based conflicts in contemporary Ghanaian politics? The paper is organized as follows. The first section highlights the general historical background of Africa’s governance, from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial periods. The second section gives account of how democratic transition impacts ethnic conflicts. In the third section, Ghana’s attempt at democratic governance immediately after independence from British rule in 1957 is assessed. The forth section discusses the ethnic factor in Ghana’s body politic, focusing on multiparty democratic elections between 1992 and 2012. Based on the evidence from various perspectives, the paper concludes by stressing the complicity of the Western form of democracy in exacerbating ethnic conflicts in Ghana, and by extension Africa and suggests possible ways of improving multiparty democratic elections in order that they do not degenerate into ethnic violence.

**THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION (DEMOCRATIZATION)**

Irrespective of how it is defined, democracy is expected to promote the rule of law and good governance—in terms of accountability, legitimacy, and transparency. This is because, in democracies, the citizens are considered the sovereign as they freely choose their representatives and replace them when they see fit through competitive elections. This enables them to participate (albeit indirectly) in the making of decisions that affect their lives. Democracies also have built-in institutional checks and balances, including the law courts that enable political differences to be settled authoritatively. When these institutions function as designed, there is a reduction in the chances for violence or wars. Democratic states are also expected to be at peace with one another, so long as they maintain the democratic ideals. Hence, scholars of “democratic peace” school of thought suggest democratization as a pre-condition for good governance that rest on rule of law and respect for human rights (Russet, 1993).

However, in spite of its conflict management potentials the process of change from an authoritarian regime to democracy can be quite challenging as most transitional countries often lack the robust institutional frameworks that functional democracies necessitate. In such contexts democratization itself can be a prime source of ethnic conflicts and wars (Tilly, 2000). In contemporary Africa, the odds of colonial “divide and rule” system, and post-colonial political developments or even the dynamics of globalization, have played major roles in instigating conflicts, especially among ethnic groups. This is because the institutional capacity of most African states is usually weak prior to democratization.

According to Gill (2000, p. 2), although several theoretical dimensions exist on the subject, they all converge at the point where answers are solicited for the question: “how does democracy come about and what makes it endure?” Three main elements are identified by Bunce (2003), cited by Vorrath and Krebs (2009) as central to a successful and peaceful democratic transitions. According to him:

- the national and the state question need to be settled;
- the rules of the transition and the new political order are the result of bargaining between a small group of the autocratic elites and the small group of representatives of the democratic opposition; and
- the co-operation of the authoritarians can be secured through co-optation. Thus, transitions are essentially a compromise between the old and the new elites.

Regarding the first point, Rustow (1970) stresses the importance of a consensus on national identity prior to democratization. Others such as Huntington (1968), and Linz and Stephen (1996) argue that a legitimate and viable order has to be established first before any democratic transition. Reemphasizing the interaction between state-building and democratization, Schmitter et al. (2005) write that “a capable state is not only seen as a precondition for successful democratization; democratization can
affect state capacity as well.” Similarly, Bratton and Chang (2006) contend that, mutually reinforcing process between state-building and regime consolidation can become a vicious cycle that may lead to state decay as the case of Democratic Republic of Congo shows.

What these studies tried to achieve is the demonstration that state-building and democratization cannot work in the same direction. In other words, a country stands a better chance in its democratization process when state institutions are built first. This implies that functioning state bureaucracy, rule of law, strong political institutions, etc., are necessary preconditions for any democratization process. In summary, therefore, scholars almost agree that where a transition takes place before the proper institutional foundations have been laid, democracy is likely to fail (Bunce, 2003; Huntington, 1968; Linz and Stephen, 1996; Rustow, 1970; Schmitter et al., 2005; and Vorrath and Krebs, 2009).

In countries where the national and the state questions have not been settled as well as the non-existence of viable and legitimate institutional order, democracy or any democratization process is bound to face challenges which, more often than not, manifest along ethnic lines. Thus, it is not surprising that almost all African states suffer from these democratic transition pitfalls to the extent that some scholars call for the identification of appropriate political institutions that are capable of accommodating different groups, rather than the “idealized” condition for democratization. In the midst of the dilemma, however, the perceived failure of “democracy” raises the question as to why pre-colonial African system of government seemed to have done a better job of apprehending and managing ethnic cleavages than post-colonial democratic regimes.

In an attempt to answer the above question, examples of some traditional African regimes are cited for the sake of comparison. Not only did these African governments exhibit democratic tendencies, they actually followed well-structured systems of rules and laws that encouraged ethnic cohesion. For instance, in their comparative analysis of the Akan (Ghana) and Yoruba (Nigeria) models of traditional governance Adjei and Adebayo (2014, p. 92), highlight the traditional conflict adjudication mechanisms predicated mainly on reconciliation instead of judicial or court adjudication systems based on winner-takes-all or zero-sum game syndrome. More evidences exist on the capabilities of African precolonial governments in soothing ethnic cleavages. To further lay the foundation for this argument, the paper now shifts its attention to the precolonial systems of governance in Africa.

**PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT AND ETHNICITY**

Prior to the arrival of the European colonial powers, African societies had their own forms of government. Most of these systems were based on empires, and every society had a set of rules, laws, traditions, and customs. These empires were, in many regards, similar to kingdoms and empires in Asia and Europe at the same time (Boahen, 1989; and Parsons, 2010). The king and his councilors and advisors carried out executive, legislative, and judicial functions, but in a few instances there were separations of powers.

Secondly, just as was true in Europe, Asia, and the Americas, not all African people lived in large kingdoms. There were smaller centralized political units called “city states” made up of quite large urban or semi-urban areas. While these shared much in common with customs that existed within the larger African kingdoms, the primary difference here was in terms of size (e.g. Old Oyo, Ile, Ilorin, and Ibadan of West Africa; Sofala, Kilwa, Mombasa, and Lamu of East Africa). The third political system were the “decentralized,” “acephalous,” or “stateless” political societies. Most of these societies, in addition to not having kings, chiefs or ruling elites, were often made up of neighboring towns and villages that had no political connections with a larger kingdom or nation, but were governed by councils of elders. In all these, the argument has been whether the concept of democratic governance is exclusively a Western concept of which African societies now stand desperately in need of. According to Nwauwa
(2003), before the contact and subsequent colonization, Africans practiced some variants of democracy alongside authoritarian rule. Unfortunately, Europeans came to undermine this traditional participatory democratic system for almost one hundred years, only to revive it on the eve of decolonization in the form of a parliamentary system (Ayittey, 1998). Similarly, Adu Boahen (1989, p. 23) posits that “On all fronts—economic, political, social, and even intellectual—Africa was in the mood of change and revolution, accepting new challenges, showing ability at adaptation and modification, fighting back racist doctrines, and above all changing its economy and politics to suite socioeconomic realities of the day.” These facts, serve as counter measures to the notion that the continent of Africa and its people were primitive, static or undemocratic as the Western colonizers wanted the world to believe.

Thus, the literature attests that, in the period preceding colonial rule, Africa’s political experimentation ranges from direct and representative democracy to various forms of monarchical and decentralized systems (Evans-Pritchard, 1940; Mair, 1974; Murdock, 1959; Nwauwa, 2003; and Owusu, 1997). Specifically, many writers on the democratic credentials of pre-colonial Africa cite the indigenous political system of the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria and the Ashanti of Ghana, as elaborate examples of direct and participatory democracy in traditional Africa. One of such writers, Victor Uchendu (1965), isolated two layers of political structures among the Igbo: the village and the village-group. According to him and few others, it was at the village level that democracy could best be observed. During general assembly, every male adult directly participated in the legislative and decision-making process pertaining to public affairs. In the same vein women had their own assemblies where social matters were discussed in the open for which dissenting views were largely accommodated (Achebe, 1958; Maillu, 1997; Nwabara, 1977; and Uchendu, 1965).

**HOW COLONIALISM DISTORTED AFRICA’S TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE**

After the imposition of colonial rule, the entire African culture and traditional governance structures were besieged by Europeans who had ulterior motives. Governors who were appointed to rule the colonies had their mandate from metropolitan European capitals. Being military officers or career public servants, these governors had little or no regard for Africans and their government structures. Instead, they suppressed the African people through the use of their colonial army and police who only understood the language of “pure force.” Thus, several historians describe the colonial administrators’ style of governance as oppressive, dictatorial, and sometimes barbaric (Acemoglu et al., 2001; Boahen, 1989; Nwauwu, 2003; and Parson, 2010). Almost unanimously, these authors were convinced that since the colonial administrators owed their loyalty to those who appointed them, they became dictatorial, ruling by decrees and incarcerating Africans without due process of law.

Due to the high-handedness of colonial administration, pockets of resistance began to emerge in many parts of Africa. As a result, the colonial governors resorted to the use of “Indirect Rule” system where African traditional rulers were manipulated and used to achieve imperialist goals. Consequently, chiefs and other elites who were prepared to demean their status as stooges or “errand boys” were used against their own African people. Those who stood firm and challenged the colonial system, had their traditional titles removed to the extent that some were forced into exile. In the case of Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast), for instance, when it became clear that the Asantehene (King) Agyeman Prempeh I was not accepting the governor’s directives, he was captured in 1896 and sent to exile in the Seychelles (Boahen, 1989; Gareth, 1998; Tordoff, 1965; and Hopkins, 1999).

In acephalous states, several colonial chiefs referred to as “warrant chiefs” were installed and imposed on the people by the colonial governors. This subversive attitude of colonial rule, incidentally, was carried over to the postcolonial era.
The system ran counter both to the African precolonial political systems as well as the postcolonial constitutional democracies.

**THE EFFECT OF COLONIAL RULE ON POST-INDEPENDENT AFRICA**

As noted by Nwauwa (2003), the wanton brutality and dictatorship that characterized colonial regimes were carried forward by many African nationalists who were at the helm after independence. Such leaders included Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure of Guinea, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and Jomo Kenyatta/Arap Moi of Kenya. Similar to colonial governors, these African leaders after taking over government became high-handed in dealing with their people. They ruled beyond the reach of accountability, or what Ayittey describes as “sultanism” whereby freedom of expression was curtailed. This brought the emergence of one-party state that created a breeding ground for ambitious, corrupt, and dictatorial African leaders some of whom later surfaced in military uniforms. For these reasons, many historians including Basil Davidson think that “African states inherited dictatorship and not democracy” (Boahen, 1989; Ayittey, 1998; Davidson, 1992; Nwauwa, 2003; Owusu, 1997; and Sklar, 1983).

Consequently, there have been several calls to the effect that this dominant way of disguising democracy to achieve parochial interest must be revisited. For instance, Joseph (1997, p. 365) argues that “democracy must be expanded into a broader conceptualization” just as Makinda (1996, p. 557) thinks that “democracy should be conceived as a way of government firmly rooted in the belief that people in any society should be free to determine their political, economic, social, and cultural systems.” For David Maillu (1997, p. 255), “a broader concept of democracy should include cultural definition in which African democracy like philosophy had to be lived, theories aside.” He thinks that “African societies were socially and politically structured such that everybody participated according to his ability, ages-status, and wishes” (Maillu, 1997, p.255; see also Joseph, 1997; and Makinda, 1996). One can ask:

Why did African leaders allow this inherited, distorted version of democracy to persist? The next section deliberates on some of these reasons using Ghana’s democracy as an example.

**GHANA’S POST-INDEPENDENCE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS**

Many states in Africa experienced frequent regime changes soon after independence. Continued economic scarcity coupled with the interplay of political forces left little doubt in analysts’ mind that instability and ethnic upheaval was going to shape the post-colonial future of many African countries (Davidson, 1992). Ghana had its share of this prediction when, after her independence in 1957, the country witnessed a system that was geared towards increased state control. Initially under its first leader, Kwame Nkrumah, deliberate attempt was made to establish majoritarian democracy which later transformed into a kind of hegemonic control. Rothchild’s narrative portrays Ghana’s post-colonial regime as “periodic shifts from polyarchy, hegemony control, military autocracy to democracy” (Rothchild 1997, p. 18).

To make matters worse, a military take-over in 1972 changed the political terrain of Kwame Nkrumah’s majoritarian democracy/hegemonic control to military autocracy under General Kutu Acheampong and at some point military-populism under Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings from 1981 to 1992. Rawlings’ regime, which by 1983 could be described as a classical form of bureaucratic centralism due to its military cum civilian composition, experienced several domestic public agitations for political reforms. Amidst international pressure, the regime had no choice but to organize democratic elections in 1992 based on a new national constitution. Since then, although sometimes witnesses some level of political turbulence, Ghana has been making efforts to strengthen multiparty democracy and general elections have been held every four years.
The Ethnic Factor in Ghana’s General Elections 1992-2012

The ethnic dimension to voting patterns during Ghana’s current 4th Republican Constitution (1992 Constitution) has its prelude from the general political atmosphere before and immediately after independence in 1957. After independence, Ghana’s modern state formation based on its centralized governance structures coupled with the colonial legacy began to receive various forms of ethnic responses. Political parties that contested Ghana’s first election in 1956 included the Northern People’s Party (NPP), Togoland Congress (TC), the Convention People’s Party (CPP), and the National Liberation Movement (NLM). As their names sound, except for the CPP which tried to balance the ethnic card, the NPP was predominantly meant for ethnic groups located in the northern part of Ghana, TC was for the Ewes in the Trans Volta Togoland, and the NLM was dominated by the Akans. Unfortunately, the expectations of the ethnic-colored parties were not meet. While the CPP won seventy-one (71) seats, the NPP, TCP, and NLM won fifteen (15), twelve (12), and two (2) respectively. In addition to the physical clashes, arson and violence that characterized the electoral process, there was clear evidence to the effect that “tribal” politics had little impact in Ghana’s democratization process.

This notwithstanding, there have been some deliberate efforts by political elites to cash-in on the blurry ethnic divisions in Ghana mostly for parochial interests. Consequently, the nation’s elections have followed ethnic lines but with a kind of staggered trend over the years. This scenario encompasses the politics since 1992 involving the two vibrant political parties: The National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP). Table 1 depicts the regional (ethnic) voting trend between these two vibrant parties, NDC and NPP, between 1992 and 2012.

In this period, a total of six (6) general elections were held in Ghana. The 1992, 1996, and 2000 elections indicate reasonable ethnic trends, particularly between the regions of Volta and Ashanti. While landslide votes were recorded by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) in the Volta region under the leadership of Flt. Lt. J.J. Rawlings (Rtd.) on the basis of his ethnic lineage, his counterpart Professor Albert Adu Boahen of New Patriotic Party (NPP) had massive votes from his native region, Ashanti. In spite of the fact that this trend continued in all subsequent elections, their magnitude continue to change which political analysts claim are results of presidential candidates’ personality factors (Asante and Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Senaya, 2008).

It is worth noting that the personality factor seemed to have worked positively such that government has changed hands three consecutive times between the two dominant parties of NDC and NPP in spite of their labels as Ewe and Ashanti parties respectively. Thus, the NPP took over for two terms (2000 and 2004) after the NDC’s initial first two terms (1992 and 1996). The baton again changed back to the NDC in 2008 which won its second term in 2012. Suggestively, voter education is gradually shifting towards “issue-based” rather than “ethnic-based” politics in Ghana, thus, a sign of good democratization process. One of the instances that supports the idea that voters are shifting away from ethnic lines was the example of 2008 general elections. The winner of the 2008 election, Prof. Attah Mills, a Fante (Akan) from the Central region, who stood on the ticket of the NDC party labeled as Ewe party, won an overwhelming majority vote from the Volta (Ewe) region compared to his region Akan homeland. As shown by Ghana’s political map (see Figure 1), the Akan ethnic group comprise mainly of Ashanti, Eastern, Central, Brong Ahafo and Western regions. Per the Electoral Commission of Ghana (2008) results in Table 2, Prof. Attah Mills did far better in the Ewe speaking region (82.88% in Volta) than his home region (50.58% in Central).

The Liability of Western Forms of Democracy for Ethnic Conflicts in Ghana and Elsewhere

The African traditional system of government as has been alluded to earlier in this paper precipitated on the concept of majoritarian inclusiveness. Even
without the incorporation of multiparty elections as is the case today, African societies were able to choose their leaders and lived in harmony. Convincingly, it appeared that citizens at the time were more concerned with their role in decision-making processes rather than how their leaders were selected. The wisdom behind this line of thinking stemmed from the fact that traditional leaders were seen more or less as “figure heads” who upheld the internal decision-making control measures on all major issues that affected the larger group. Thus, even though the method of selecting traditional leaders may be considered to lack transparency, limited to only few elders and kingmakers, considerable “behind the scenes” consultations involving clan and family heads characterized the selection process. Thus, if one has the option to compare post-independence democratic multiparty system of government with that of traditional system of government in terms of their conflict control mechanisms, it may suffice to conclude that multiparty democracy has been more ethnically conflict prone. Over time, most multiparty elections have been fiercely contested because of the “winner-takes-all” policy that goes with it. In other words, ethnic clusters in a particular state have everything to lose if a contestant from their origin fails to win in an election. Considering the many civil wars Africa has witnessed in recent memory, multiparty democratic elections’ complicity in orchestrating ethnic violence cannot be in doubt. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Cote d’Ivoire, Rwanda, North and South Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria are but a few examples where civil wars were the direct result of election disagreements.

In Liberia for instance, what one might call a prelude to the civil war started when Samuel Doe’s Krahn ethnic group was politically marginalized against the Gio, Mandingo and Mano ethnic groups who were loyal to the opposition leader, Charles Taylor (Ellis, 1999). Similarly, Cote d’Ivoire’s situation presented Laurent Gbagbo’s southern ethnic groups’ devotion to maintain Gbagbo as the president even when it was obvious that he lost the election to Alassane Quattara in its 2010 multiparty democratic election. The result of this was a war between the ethnic groups belonging to the camps of these leaders with heinous civilian casualties. The stories remain the same for all the states listed above. What is worth noting in all these is how democracy as it is being practiced in Africa has nurtured ethnic conflicts that were not, hitherto, known in the affected regions. In other words the Western form of democracy has done more harm than good in terms of the escalating ethnic rivalries on the continent. But, can there be any good lessons to be learned from multiparty democracy as it is being practiced in the Western world? Based on the literature, the flipside also holds a good promise that when practiced with all the prerequisites in place, democracy can engender societal stability and development.

Contrary to these bad cases, in Ghana one may be right to suggest that the country has been able to escape violent ethnic conflicts largely because of some good governance and conflict management strategies enshrined in her political electioneering process. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, besides guaranteeing the freedom of all citizens and the right to vote and be voted for in multiparty democratic elections, also put in place several other practical conflict management mechanisms. In its 2014 governance assessment report, the World Bank describes Ghana as a country that continues to show good performance on domestic governance. The report specifically indicates among others, that Ghana has strong multi-party political system, growing media pluralism, and strong civil society activism (World Bank, 2014). Again, Asante and Gyima-Boadi (2004) commend Ghana’s constitutional democracy since 1992 in their study on “Ethnic Structures, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Ghana.” Part of their findings asserts that “although ethnic rivalries and jealousies exist among certain ethnic groups which sometimes foster conflicts, Ghana’s governance institutions and public policies have been generally sensitive to the complex challenges presented by the heterogeneous nature of the society” (Asante and Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 135).

It is interesting to note that in spite of the fact that Ghana’s electoral rules appear to have been on the majoritarian “winner-takes-all” model, there is also
adequate safeguards that protect the minority group that do not vote for the winning party. Thus, the formula for sharing the “national cake” is based on fairness and needs instead of on an ethnic group’s loyalty to a regime. For example, between 1992 and 2000 during President Rawlings’s regime under NDC (Ewe dominated party), the Ashanti region where the NDC’s least votes came from was reported to have received the largest chunk of development projects (Andre and Meple-Somps, 2006). One of the reasons behind this is the fact that beyond the pursuance of its electoral mandate, the government needs a peaceful country to govern. Thus, paying attention to the losers of an election is a clever way of controlling electoral related conflicts in an ethnically divided society. Again, Ghana’s constitutions since independence have entrenched the “avoidance of discrimination act” where governments over the years are mandated to share resources fairly irrespective of ethnic voting trends [Article 35 (1) of 1969; Article 42 (5) of 1979; and Article 55 (4) of 1992].

Additionally, other non-constitutional provisions on election matters have also received popularity within the Ghanaian society over the years. Viewed as a conflict management tool, prior to its 2012 general elections, all contestants or candidates were assembled before prominent traditional rulers to take an oath that they would abide by the election result. On top of all these, the sensitivity of Ghanaians including political elites to seek the “rule of law” in solving conflicts cannot be over emphasized. Ghana’s decision to use the court system to deal with her recent (2012) presidential election dispute was hailed by the world as a case worth emulating.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

In this paper four main tasks have been attempted. The paper tried to narrate the way Africans governed themselves before the arrival of Europeans and how colonization truncated its progress. The myth surrounding the white-man’s notion as the exclusive originator of democratic concept has been explained. The paper also exposes the sense in which African states transitioned into post-independence governance and how the challenges created by colonial rule, including ethnic conflicts, are being positively dealt with, using Ghana as a case. Finally, the paper provided some good thoughts on conflict management mechanisms that may be necessary for democratic governance to thrive in Africa such that the current spate of post-election ethnic conflicts may be minimized.

It is made clear through the discussions that the colonial governors took advantage of the vulnerability of the African people by using their own traditional system to perpetrate their agenda through “divide and rule.” In so doing, the structures of political, economic, social, and cultural development in Africa were distorted. On the question of whether democratic strand in governance was a Western idea, the historical analyses based on several intellectual perspectives asserted that the concept of democracy in Africa could first be traced to African traditional regimes. In fact, the example of Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, among many others, is cited as well-structured democracies prevailing in Africa prior to colonial rule. European colonialists ignored these democratic governance structures; instead, they imposed autocratic colonial rule on the people. As independence loomed, the last batch of colonial governors tried desperately to now impose “democracy” which came little too late. The question, then, is: Assuming African societies were allowed to continue with their precolonial way of selecting leaders, would ethnic conflicts have been minimal?

Linking the argument to the case under consideration, the discussions has shown the extent to which Ghana, for instance, has struggled (and still struggles) to bring back the good old days of traditional governance, which significantly ensured political, economic, social, and cultural cohesion among ethnic groups. In the aftermath of colonialism, the attempt to institute democracy was faced with conflicts, most of which had ethnic undertones. Democracy, in Western context, has been the creator or escalator of new ethnic conflicts, especially given the rate at which civil wars result from multiparty democratic elections in Africa. On the other hand based on Ghana’s example, it is also
fair to conclude that democracy per se cannot be blamed for ethnic rivalries in African societies. Rather, democratic system of governance, if practiced in the context of the local culture of the people can bring about peace.

The fact that Ghana has not experienced any full-scale ethnic conflict as we have seen in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Cote d’Ivoire suggests that strengthening democracy through multi-party elections based on rule of law, press freedom, pluralism, strong civil society, fair distribution of state resources, etc., the future could be bright for Africa. Specifically, it is my recommendation that it is about time African nations put the colonial past behind them and work towards building good governance structures that minimizes corruption and electoral malpractices.

**Tables**

**Table 1: Ashanti and Volta Regional Presidential Election Results between NDC & NPP (%)**

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>32.87</td>
<td>60.54</td>
<td>20.11</td>
<td>79.89</td>
<td>24.06</td>
<td>74.61</td>
<td>25.01</td>
<td>74.99</td>
<td>*N/A</td>
<td>*N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volta</td>
<td>93.24</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>88.47</td>
<td>11.53</td>
<td>83.38</td>
<td>14.26</td>
<td>86.06</td>
<td>13.94</td>
<td>*N/A</td>
<td>*N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana’s website (www.ec.gov.gh). *Figures not displayed at the time of writing this paper.

**Table 2: 2008 Presidential Election Regional Percentage Votes Won by Professor Attah Mills, Candidate for NDC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Ashanti</th>
<th>B/A</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
<th>G/A</th>
<th>Northern</th>
<th>U/E</th>
<th>U/W</th>
<th>Volta</th>
<th>Western</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vote (%)</td>
<td>26.13</td>
<td>47.70</td>
<td>50.58</td>
<td>41.10</td>
<td>52.11</td>
<td>56.84</td>
<td>56.06</td>
<td>54.36</td>
<td>82.88</td>
<td>47.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Electoral Commission of Ghana’s official website (www.ec.gov.gh)
References


