

ABIBISEM

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

*A Publication of the Department of History
University of Cape Coast, Ghana*



VOL. 5, 2012 & 6 2013

425.02

ABIBISEM

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

A Publication of the Department of History
University of Cape Coast, Ghana



Volume 5, 2012 and Volume 6, 2013

© Department of History,
University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Colonial Boundaries and the Challenges of Transition to Multi-Party Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Wilson YAYOH

Abstract

At independence, African countries south of the Sahara were confronted with the problem of national integration. This problem was borne out of the partition of the continent in a manner that brought different ethnic groups together to form artificially created states. This paper argues that the difficulties most African countries faced during the wholesale transition to multi-party rule in the 1990s were traceable to the ethnic diversities of the states. A sense of shared nationality, a pre-requisite for national integration and unity, was weak or was yet to be forged in most countries. This weakness had negative implications for multi-party democracy in Africa, for political pluralism stirred up ethnic conflicts/upheavals which tore countries apart. Pro-democracy movements during the transitional period emboldened the zeal of component ethnic groups to assert their identities on the political scene.

Key words: Democratization, Nation, Nationalism, Irredentism, Secession, State

Introduction

One of the assumptions that underpinned the imposition of multi-party democracy by the West on sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1990s was that political liberalism would foster peace, stability and national security. As it was during the partition when artificial boundaries were created without regard to the geo-political and social realities of the continent, so it was with the introduction of multi-party democracy in sub-Saharan Africa. The transition to multi-party democracy from 1990 to 2000 was problematic and years on, democracy in sub-Saharan Africa remained fragile. There was an upsurge in ethnic conflicts since the 1990s, even in hitherto peaceful regions. Various countries were confronted with the task of conducting free and fair elections (in every four or five years) and balancing political power. During the transitional period, the problem of forging national integration became hydra-headed. This paper argues that the difficulties sub-Saharan Africa faced in their efforts to democratise in the 1990s were traceable to the partition of the continent in the period 1890 to 1900. Colonial boundaries were part of the imperial design of divide and rule which has had ramifications for the present democratic dispensation in sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa before the Partition

African societies south of the Sahara were generally relatively peaceful before the advent of the colonizers in the later part of the nineteenth century, albeit the centuries of devastation caused by the introduction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.³⁷¹ Alliances were formed between some states for economic, diplomatic and political interests. The inter-state wars that occurred in pre-colonial times were nevertheless necessary for state formation, a phenomenon common the world over. Europe, right from the thirteenth century through to the twentieth century witnessed countless wars, two of which engulfed the whole world. Indeed, before the seventeenth century, Africa's political landscape was fragmented. Small ethnic groups had existed.³⁷² The seventeenth century, however, saw the expansion and consolidation of large empires or states with well organised internal administrative mechanisms. The West African region witnessed the emergence of Akan polities out of the commercial networks of the lower Volta River and by the eighteenth century, Asante had emerged as a powerful empire ruling 'over a mixture of different provinces and dependencies'.³⁷³ Asante and Dahomey were celebrated for their elaborate and efficient administrative structures. The emergence of the Zulu empire in 1820, the flourishing of Nyamwezi state of Uramba and Ukimbu by the 1850s, the growth of Samori Toure's empire by the 1880s as well as the complex interlacustrine states of Buganda, Bunyoro, Busoga and Karagwe, which were at the pick of their glory in the 1860s, attest to this development.³⁷⁴ So clearly, Africa itself from the seventeenth century evolved its own internal mechanisms for the crystallisation of large political

³⁷¹For the physical destruction caused by the slave trade, see Philip Curtin, 'The West African Coast in the Era of the Slave Trade' in Philip Curtin et al (eds.), *African History from Earliest Times to Independence* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 211.

³⁷²Hizkias Assefa sees ethnic group as a collection of people who share the same primordial characteristics such as common ancestry, language and culture. Therefore ethnicity is the behaviour and feeling that supposedly emanates from members of an ethnic group. In effect, ethnic conflicts refer to cleavages between groups based on differentiations in ethnic identities. See Hizkias Assefa 'Ethnic Conflicts in the Horn of Africa: Myth and Reality', *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World*, (Tokyo, 1996), p. 33.

³⁷³Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Oxford, 2002), p. 320.

³⁷⁴For Nyamwezi, see Steven Feierman, 'A Century of Irony in East Africa (c. 1780-1890)' in Curtin et al (eds.), *African History*, p. 359. John Hannings, the English explorer who visited the lake region in 1860, described the interlacustrine states as having 'complex political and social systems'. See Robert O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 114. For the growth of Samori Toure's empire, see Philip Curtin et al, *African History from the Earliest Times to Independence* (Edinburgh, 1995), p. 349.

entities or states. Some of these transformations were connected to militarism, but as stated earlier, they were part of the processes of state formation.

The Problem of Shared Nationality

The political processes of large state formation were truncated by the partition of Africa in the period 1890 to 1900, which left the continent divided into some 52 states. African resistance to the partition was forceful but it crushed under the weight of European military might. The artificial boundaries created had no basis whatsoever in the geo-political and social realities of the continent. The territories 'lacked ethnic and linguistic logic as well as historical roots'.³⁷⁵ The new states were extremely heterogeneous with people of diverse ethnic, linguistic and historical backgrounds. The logical consequence of this phenomenon was the emergence of states rather than nations in Africa – a situation best described as micro-nations within macro-nations. In sub-Saharan Africa, people remained sentimentally attached to their ethnic groups to the extent that they would not sacrifice it for mere cooperation with other groups within the colonial territory. This led some scholars to consider the notions of 'nation' and 'nationalism' as problematic terms in the African context.³⁷⁶ According to B. J. Berman, African indigenous cultures were difficult to obliterate because of their 'ability to create new identities' and re-order old ones.³⁷⁷ Contemporary African states governed by nationalist leaders suffered from divided sovereignty because chiefs of the various ethnic groups drew their legitimacy and authority from pre-colonial roots while the new states were created by colonial rule.³⁷⁸ For example, in Ghana the root cause of tension between the nationalist reformist, Kwame Nkrumah, and the traditional authorities was traceable to the insistence of some chiefs 'that the pre-colonial kingdoms were, in effect, sovereign powers'.³⁷⁹ This entrenched position of chiefs explains the pervasiveness of ethnic sentiments in the new African states.

Nationalism developed in Western Europe by the seventeenth century through the dissolution of many languages and dialects and the subsequent emergence of fewer languages over a relatively larger

³⁷⁵ Richard Reid, *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford, 2009), p. 256.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 256; John H. Kautsky, *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries: Nationalism and Communism* (New York, 1962), p. 37.

³⁷⁷ Bruce J. Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism', *African Affairs*, No. 388 (July, 1998), p. 306.

³⁷⁸ Donal I. Ray, 'Divided Sovereignty in Ghana', *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 37-38 (1996), p. 198.

³⁷⁹ Richard Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, p. 32.

geographical area. The fewer languages then became vehicles for the spread of cultural elements such as tradition, religion and literature.³⁸⁰ This was followed by the replacement of feudalism by royal absolutism which saw many more people learning the language of the government in order to be able to engage in commerce, an enterprise which was under the control of the royal governments.³⁸¹ In this way, the 'Queen's English' for example, became the dominant language of the UK, with Welsh confined to a smaller area as a remnant language of the era of feudalism. So then, 'nationalism' and 'nation' came to denote a people speaking a common language and having a common culture and government made up of people speaking the same language. Put differently, a defined territory, a government with a common language and culture are crucial elements of nationalism. One will recall how the language factor played out in the unification of Italy and Germany; though other considerations and interests were also important in the creation of those two nations.³⁸²

A checklist provided by Asiwaju shows the partition of Africa resulted in some 103 boundary lines, and in all these cases ethnic groups were divided, some between two or three countries.³⁸³ The Ewe can be found in Ghana, Togo and Benin, while the Yoruba could be found in Benin and Nigeria. People of Somalia origin could also be found in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. The list is endless. There was hardly one of these states that had not had cause to complain about the position of its boundaries vis-a-vis its neighbours. Irredentism and secession were common features of Africa's post-colonial history. Attempts by splinter groups to come together often stirred up trouble in the new states in which the partition located them. The Ewe Unification Movement in the trans-Volta Togoland Region in the 1950s, the attempt by the Shaba province in the former Belgian Congo (Congo Leopoville) to form its own government in the 1960s, the protracted struggle of southern Somalia for independence of northern Somalia, as well as the attempt by the Ibo of Nigeria to do the same in 1967 readily come into focus. Mwesiga Baregu has demonstrated how the 'inherited arbitrary colonial borders' triggered off irredentism and secession in some parts of east and central Africa.³⁸⁴ All of this is indicative of the pervasiveness of the

³⁸⁰ Kautsky, *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries*, p. 31.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945* (London, 1968), p. 45; E. Lipson, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914* (London, 1968), p. 162.

³⁸³ A. I. Asiwaju (ed.), *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984* (Lagos, 1984), p. 256-259.

³⁸⁴ Mwesiga Baregu, "Resources, Interests and Conflicts in the Great Lake Region", in Youssef M. Sawani, *Reflections of Scholars on the African Union* (Benghazi, 2005), p. 154.

consequences of the imposition of colonial boundaries on Africa, for as Reid puts it, 'what Africa is today has its roots in that era'.³⁸⁵

The nationalist movements that emerged during the colonial era did not and could not change the colonially created boundaries to conform to language and cultural areas. What is often referred to rather confusingly as nationalists movements in sub-Saharan Africa in the post war era were, in fact, anti-colonial movements, for as soon as the common enemy, the colonial power, was removed, the various ethnic groups began jostling for political independence within the colonially created states. Therefore national integration and values such as patriotism (which were necessary for the development of the concept of shared nationality) were difficult to realise in Africa south of the Sahara to this day. Even during the period of the so-called nationalist movements, the development of organic Africa nationalism was problematic due to the existence of multiplicity of identities – ethnicity, language, culture – which were restrictive to the development of territorial nationalism.³⁸⁶ This was contrary to what happened in Egypt in the later part of the nineteenth century where the territory's history, culture, language and national coherence were responsible for the development of early organic nationalism. It is difficult to give the exact number of languages spoken in Africa, though some linguists suggested that some 1500 languages were spoken across the continent on the eve of the partition.³⁸⁷ It is fascinating, however, that there were more than 300 languages spoken in Nigeria and more that 200 in Ghana. This explains why the concept of shared nationality was weak in Africa south of the Sahara.³⁸⁸

Multi-Party Democracy

Historians would recall the experiments in multi-party democracy in sub-Saharan Africa in the early years of independence. At the end of those experiments, the nationalist leaders found democracy to be incongruous with sub-Saharan Africa's peculiar circumstances borne out of the partition. It was in the light of the arduous task of forging national integration that African nationalist leaders such as Nkrumah of Ghana, Nyerere of Tanzania and Kaunda of Zambia abhorred multi-party rule. Multi-party democracy with its concomitant struggle for political power created invigorating conditions for various ethnic groups to strive to legitimize their identity. In the process, nationality bonds remained weak. Interestingly, the colonial powers themselves never practiced multi-party rule. Political expression of any kind was seriously proscribed. Colonial troops were brought in to quell

³⁸⁵ Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*, p. 257.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

³⁸⁷ Figure taken from John Parker and Richard Rathbone, *African History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2007), p. 26.

³⁸⁸ For the figure on Nigeria, see *Ibid.*

any expression of dissatisfaction.³⁸⁹ In the words of Nelson Kasfir, the colonial state was therefore essentially a military administrative unit whose officers felt that it was only this kind of rule that could hold the various ethnic groups together. The colonial states were therefore 'bureaucratically designed, authoritarian in nature and primarily concerned with issues of domination rather than legitimacy'.³⁹⁰ Thus the colonial political culture bequeathed to the nationalist leaders contained the notion that authoritarianism was an appropriate mode of rule. This view justifies the nationalist leaders' decision to introduce one-party states during the first decade of independence. It was this which led Mahmood Mamdani to conclude that authoritarian governments of contemporary Africa were products of 'decentralized despotism' created by colonial governments.³⁹¹ Analysts observed that free competitive electoral democracy in heterogeneous societies encouraged party leaders to manipulate latent ethnic or religious animosities as a way to win votes.³⁹²

Ghana's experiment with multi-party democracy in the run-up to independence typified the complexity of the problem. At independence, some of the major ethnic groups which were brought together by the partition to form the Gold Coast, and held together by the colonizing power, sought to assert their identity and independence.³⁹³ This latent desire to break loose of the Gold Coast found expression in the emergence of ethno-political parties. It became obvious therefore that the opposition parties such as the Togoland Congress, the Northern People's Party, and the National

³⁸⁹ The French military action against rebellion in Madagascar in 1946 and the *maji maji* revolt in German East Africa (Tanganyika) were examples of many such suppression of descent during the colonial era. See Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, *Africa since 1800* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 265-266; Richard Reid, *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford, 2009), p. 158-9.

³⁹⁰ Nelson Kasfir, "Design and Dilemmas: An Overview", *Local Government in the Third World: The experience of Tropical Africa* (New York, 1983), p. 34; N. Chazan, R. Mortimer et al, *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (London, 1998), p. 4. The point was also made in Baregu, 'Resources, Interests and Conflicts', p. 155.

³⁹¹ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, 1996), p. 35-109.

³⁹² Richard Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle: Democratization and Development in Africa* (Toronto, 2000), p. 7. See also Claude Ade, 'Rethinking African Democracy' in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore, 1993), p. 72.

³⁹³ Dannis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960* (London, 1964), p. 367. For details about collaborations between the Togoland Congress and the Northern People's Party in the fight for Togoland Unification, see Paul André Landouceur, *Chiefs and Politicians: The Politics of Regionalism in Northern Ghana* (London, 1979), p. 168.

Liberation Movement (NLM), all formed in the 1950s, were breaking up the country into ethnic parties.³⁹⁴ Disturbances among the Ewe in the central Volta Region were followed by the emergence in Accra of the Ga movement known as *Ga Shifimo Kpee* which posed a threat to the control of the capital city.³⁹⁵ This development was a recipe for the emergence of 'sub-nationalism'.³⁹⁶ Some measures taken by Kwame Nkrumah such as the Preventive Detention Act of 1958, which eventually culminated in Ghana becoming a one-party state in 1964, were seen by opposition elements as repressive. The reality though, was the imminent disintegration of the new state bequeathed to Nkrumah by the British colonial government. Obviously, the ruling Convention People's Party of Ghana was distraught by the spectre of 'divided sovereignty' which was very much in evidence throughout the country.³⁹⁷ This deservedly called for swift and pragmatic measures to nip these divisive tendencies in the bud and uphold the territorial integrity of the new state.³⁹⁸

Whatever the criticism against one-party rule, it did sustain the welding of the ethnic groups together. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, in following the examples of Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia and Cote d'Ivoire, became one-party states. By the 1980s therefore, only Botswana had maintained an unbroken record of multi-party parliamentary democracy since independence.³⁹⁹ But Botswana had a relatively low population of about one million people. Admittedly, some presidents under one-party rule lured the military into politics in their bid to personalise and centralise power. Examples were Mobutu of Zaire, Eyadema of Togo and Houphoué Boigny of Cote d'Ivoire, all of whom made military power functionally indispensable to their stay in power. This accounted for the many coups d'état that characterised the history of some sub-Saharan African states. But experiment has also shown that it was feasible to observe democratic tenets

³⁹⁴ For details on the emergence of unitary state in Ghana, see Raymond Bagulo Benin, *Ghana: Regional Boundaries and National Integration* (Accra, 1999). The Togoland Congress was formed in 1950 while the National Liberation Movement and the Northern People's Party were formed in 1954. According to Biswal, the NLM was not a nationalist party as its name suggests, but it was an Asante movement. See Tapan Prasad Biswal, *Ghana: Political and Constitutional Developments* (New Delhi, 1992), p. 53. For the political parties that contested the 1951 elections see David Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (Princeton, 1972), p. 173-175.

³⁹⁵ Biswal, *Ghana*, p. 58-59.

³⁹⁶ *West Africa*, 5 January, 1957, p. 5. See also Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, p. 361; W. K. Yayoh, 'Local Government in Ewedomé, British Trust Territory of Togoland (Ghana), 1922-1974', PhD Thesis (University of London, 2010), p. 269.

³⁹⁷ Ray, 'Divided Sovereignty', p. 198.

³⁹⁸ Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, p. 372.

³⁹⁹ For details on political legacy of colonial rule, see Kelvin Shillington, *History of Africa* (London,), p. 409.

even in a one-party state. On the death of Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya in 1970, power was successfully handed over to Arap Moi. Similarly, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania handed over power in 1986. Under Nyerere, unpopular ministers were voted out of office in accordance with the will of the people.

Multi-party democracy became a global phenomenon in 1989 following the demise of the Soviet Union. Proponents espoused the desirability of democracy in promoting development and the benefits to be derived by 'Third World' countries, particularly south-Saharan Africa from political pluralism.⁴⁰⁰ But the geo-political effects of the ending of the Cold War alone could not be responsible for the resurgence of multi-party democracy in south-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. Certainly, the role of the Western powers and their financial institutions was a compelling factor. Under the weight of increased political conditionality so far as aid was concerned, sub-Saharan Africa was forced to implement rapid political change. Aid effectively became a political weapon. Whatever the benefits, it did not mean that competitive electoral democracy was workable everywhere. William Tordoff's dictum is worth quoting here:

...western governments must be realistic in the aid conditions which they impose and that while they have every right to deny development aid to flagrantly repressive regime, they are on much shakier ground in seeking to decide the political and economic systems which African states should adopt.⁴⁰¹

The evidence in sub-Saharan Africa showed clearly that political pluralism heightened ethnic separatism in heterogeneous societies. The super imposition of multi-party democracy on a complex political landscape, such as that in sub-Saharan Africa, without being cognisant of the fragile composition of the various states exacerbated ethnic conflicts during the transition period and made them difficult to resolve. In the early 1990s, Africa was still going through nation building, for the devastating effects of the Cold War in terms of polarisation of societies on ideological grounds and the proliferation of arms made the road to national integration even more tortuous. Ethnic loyalties were still very much alive in many countries because the interest of one ethnic group conflicted with the other. The introduction of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s, therefore, stirred up the centrifugal tendencies resulting in ethnic conflicts, most of which were permitted to reach exhausting proportions. The ethnic groups in

⁴⁰⁰ The description 'Third World' is used advisedly here. This description was part of a contrast drawn between the different groups of countries in the world in the twentieth century – First, Second and Third worlds. After the end of the Cold War, this model became less useful in describing the countries of the world.

⁴⁰¹ William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa* (London, 1977), p. 323

the various countries were let loose on one another as they vied for political power. In most cases, these conflicts were not localised; they spilled over to neighbouring countries because the ethnic groups cut across national boundaries.⁴⁰² Political parties suddenly sprang up based on ethnic affiliations. Although Claude Ade argues that there was 'nothing inherently conflictual about ethnic differences', he contended that the politicisation of ethnic differences by the elite could incite ethnic conflicts.⁴⁰³

To say that the political and economic situation in Cote d'Ivoire from the 1990s was better than the 30 year 'dictatorship' of Houphouët Boigny was to beg the question. Prior to the demise of Houphouët Boigny in 1993 and the introduction of multi-party democracy, Cote d'Ivoire was lauded as a model of success in the turbulent West African region. Until 1990, that country attracted migrant workers from other countries in the sub-region and private investment increased considerably.⁴⁰⁴ Houphouët Boigny had kept the various ethnic groups together for some 30 years, albeit France providing the supporting prop. But multi-party democracy from 1993 changed all that. The opening of democratic avenues saw the concept of 'Ivoirite' being evoked.⁴⁰⁵ In amending the constitution ahead of the 1995 general elections, a clause was inserted by the then President, Henry Konan-Bédié, which stipulated that a presidential candidate should have two Ivorian-born parents. By playing the ethnic card, Alassane Ouattara, a northern Muslim, and a serious contender to the presidency, could be debarred from taking part in the presidential election on the grounds that he had his origin in Burkina Faso; a victim of the partition.⁴⁰⁶ The transition to multi-party democracy in Cote d'Ivoire was thus reduced to the issue of northerners versus southerners. A rebel group that emerged in the north of the country, amidst the chaos, demanded a change in the controversial system of deciding who was an Ivorian, and whose right it was to decide who would stand in an election or to vote. The failure to resolve this thorny issue created a situation where the hitherto prosperous multi-cultural Cote

⁴⁰² See Mweiga Baregu, 'Resources, Interest and Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region', in Youssef M. Sawani (ed.), *Reflections of African Scholars on the African Union* (Benghazi, 2002), p. 148.

⁴⁰³ Claude Ade, 'Rethinking African Democracy' in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (London, 1993), p. 72.

⁴⁰⁴ Robert Calderisi, *The Trouble with Africa* (Yale, 2007), p. 115-116.

⁴⁰⁵ The concept of Ivoirité meant 'Ivorianess' which was 'a concept of nationalism that implied that anyone from outside the country's borders was suspect'. This made the northerners targets. See *Ibid.*, p. 116. In effect, Ivoirité advocated purity of Ivorianess.

⁴⁰⁶ Alassane Ouattara's mother was alleged to have been born outside the boundaries of the artificially created Ivory Coast. See Erik Gilbert, Jonathan T. Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present* (New Jersey, 2008), p. 402.

d'Ivoire became a pale shadow of its former self, leaving the question as to whether peace could ever return to that country a matter of conjecture.

Similarly, multi-party elections in 1993 following several years of authoritarianism in the Central African Republic set the stage for an ethnic conflict from 1996 to 1997.⁴⁰⁷ The election of Ange Felix Patase from the Gbaya ethnic group in the north stirred up ethnic sentiments and set the stage for the rugged road ahead of the Central African Republic. The Yakoma from the south had been in power since independence. The country, since the introduction of democracy, had been rocked by a series of coups d'état. In Kenya, the majority of the members of the opposition who were mostly minority groups in the south were labelled as migrants ahead of the 1992 elections. This provided enough grounds for the supporters of the ruling KANU government, headed by Daniel Arap Moi, to engage in ethnic cleansing on the coast.⁴⁰⁸ We also saw how 'vast stretches of Brazzaville were reduced to rubbles' in 1997 after multi-party rule was introduced in that country in 1992.⁴⁰⁹

Multi-party democracy was also partly responsible for the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Hutu and Tutsi had been held together by first the German and then the Belgian colonial governments. But both colonial regimes tended to favour the Tutsi who were more educated, due in large part to the colonial arrangement that used Tutsi as part of the colonial administration, and therefore occupied top governmental positions; though the Hutus formed 85 percent of the total population of that country by the 1990 census figures.⁴¹⁰ Both ethnic groups somewhat tried to live with this situation of 'acceptance' of the privileged position of the Tutsi, leading to the development of what is referred to in some anthropological circles as an 'axiom of inequality'.⁴¹¹ To further diffuse latent tension between Hutu and Tutsi, Major General Juvenal Habyarimana who came to power in 1973 instituted a quota system that sought to ensure proportional representation of all the ethnic groups in that country.⁴¹² This arrangement worked in holding the country together for some 20 years until 1994 when Habyarimana yielded to pressure from the West to lead the country into multi-party democracy. The move was welcomed by the Hutu whose numbers could guarantee them electoral victory. But the policy incurred the wrath of the

⁴⁰⁷ Richard Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle, Democratization and Development in Africa* (Toronto, 2000), p. 7.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 7

⁴¹⁰ For detail on how Germany and Belgium favoured the Tutsi, see Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*, p. 173.

⁴¹¹ For details, see J. J. Maquet, *The Premise of Inequality in Ruanda: A Study of Political Relations in A Central African Kingdom* (Oxford, 1961).

⁴¹² Gilbert and Reynolds, *Africa in World History*, p. 406.

Tutsi whose privileged position was threatened by multi-party democracy. The shooting down of Habyarimana's plane allegedly by the Tutsi conservatives sparked off mass killing of Tutsis. Hutu moderates were not spared either.⁴¹³

At the Algiers OAU summit in July 1999, African leaders observed that there had been an upsurge of conflicts in Africa. There were 16 conflicts and wars raging among 22 countries in various parts of the continent. The UN Secretary General's statement at the OAU Summit in Lusaka, Zambia, on 2 July 2001 epitomised the failure of Western-style liberal democracy in serving as an antidote to ethnic conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. He observed that at the root of these conflicts were prejudices, hatred and ethnic and racial differences which were exploited by leaders for destructive ends. From the genocide in Rwanda and the conflicts in Sudan to the tensions in Burundi, the continent was living with the devastating consequences of racism and intolerance. What the Secretary-General failed to note, however, was that these problems of racism and ethnic divisions were created by the partition of the continent which lumped different ethnic groups together to form artificially created countries.

The crux of the matter is that following the resurgence of multi-partyism, a gradual re-alignment of political forces started to take shape largely on ethnic lines throughout south-Saharan Africa. This accounted for the large number of political parties in most countries. Sandbrook counted 47 political parties in Mali, 70 in Cameroon, 200 in Zaire and 10 in Niger in the early 1990s.⁴¹⁴ The ethnic character of the political parties and their numbers did not only serve to confuse the electorates but also deepened the polarization of the countries, created tension and animosity. In the process, the transitional electoral outcomes in most countries were highly contested. It was in this state of apparent chaos that emerged a paradigm shift in the approach to resolving some of these electoral conflicts. Power sharing became a preferred approach to resolving contested electoral outcome. Classical examples can be found in Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and other conflict zones where power-sharing became a preferred option. The picture discernible from this shift in approach was the failure of multi-party democracy in holding the ethnic groups together in the various countries. In other words, the heterogeneous nature of the various countries made it difficult to see where an acceptable leadership could emerge.

Worst yet, after the elections ruling parties were confronted with the difficulty of ensuring equal representation in government. The selection of ministers, their deputies and other functionaries had to be seen to be

⁴¹³ Reid put the number of Tutsi and Hutu moderates killed between April and July 1994 at 1 million. See Reid, *A History of Modern Africa*, p. 126.

⁴¹⁴ Sandbrook, *Closing the Circle*. p. 35.

representative of all ethnic groups. Achieving equal representation in a heterogeneous country like Ghana with more than 200 ethnic groups was a tall order. It was, therefore, no surprise that in 2006, for example, there were about 70 minister and deputy ministers in the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government. Although it is a truism that political patronage also played a part in the appointment of the abysmally high number of government officials, one could not rule out the fruitless attempt by government to satisfy as many ethnic groups as possible.

Conclusion

Sub-Saharan Africa encountered problems during the transition to multi-party democracy in the 1990s due to the incompatibility of multi-party democracy with the colonially created states. The early 1990s saw the emergence of more political parties than the continent had experienced during the early years of independence. The debilitating factors that made for the failure of earlier experiments in multi-party democracy were still prevalent in the 1990s. The effect of the partition of Africa, far from being a closed matter, is an ongoing process. From purely historical perspective, the introduction of multi-party democracy in south-Saharan Africa represented yet another Western invention superimposed upon entirely different cultural and political structures. The resurgence of multi-party democracy in the 1990s provided fertile ground for African political leaders to change course from any attempt at diffusing ethnic divisions to using ethnic communities to build networks of political patronage. This in effect, provided the ground for ethnic conflicts that became a common feature in sub-Saharan Africa's post-Cold War history.