

Full Length Research

Traditional authority, nation-building and decentralization in African States: A change in perspective

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African states are generally inhabited by peoples of diverse historical, linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds. This feature of diversity in African states, arguably, poses a challenge in creating social cohesion for such multinational and postcolonial contexts. African states such as Ghana have endeavored to redress this problem by pursuing nation-building through decentralization of the authority of central government. Nonetheless, this effort has not yielded much of the anticipated outcome. The apparent lack of success, we think, is attributable to the type of decentralization system operational in such contexts which pays allegiance to the central government but not to the respective localities. Institutions set up to ensure that authority is decentralized often become manipulative tools of the central government. Thus, participatory, and inclusive governance is undermined at the local level. In this paper, it is argued that the non-elected devolution type of decentralization gives a central role to the indigenous traditional authority in local governance as a replacement for elected devolution, delegation, deconcentration, privatization and some other types of decentralization. Grounding the study in the theoretical framework of Kwame Gyekye's Selective Sankofaism, the study examines the indigenous Akan governmental system to draw out the key elements of decentralization inherent in that system and how it facilitates social cohesion, nation-building, and ultimately, national development.

Key words: Traditional authority, decentralization, nation-building, African States, devolution, delegation.

INTRODUCTION

Africa is, arguably, held out to the world in negative light in matters of authority and state governance. This verdict could be the outcome of, among other things, dictatorships that stemmed from the one-party state policy of the "early fathers" of freedom-from-colonialism such as Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and others like Libya's Muammar Al-Qaddafi, Sierra Leone's Siaka Stevens, Uganda's Apollo Milton Obote, Cote d'Ivoire's Félix Houphouët-Boigny and Zimbabwe's Robert

Mugabe, to mention but a few (Time 1961; van Wyk, 2007:11-12). From thereon, various attempts have been made by various nation-states within Africa to form a system tailored to the needs of each of the constituent people. Consequently, decentralization of political authority has become integral to the African context, like elsewhere, in its quest for accelerated growth and development through nation-building.

A major problem that may confront nation-building is

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determining an appropriate principle of integration for the diverse peoples found in the various African states. In most instances, attempts at nation-building have led to the suppression and marginalization of some constituent groups. This has led to struggles and revolts from such subjugated, mostly ethnic or language, groups; examples include the Rwandan genocide and the Niger Delta unrest in Nigeria (Venkatasawmy, 2015:31). The foregoing raises the question of how possible or plausible it is for a post-colonial 'multinational state' to divest its authority, either in part or whole, to its constituent-nations and still pursue a 'nation-building' agenda.

The author asserts that the Akan of Ghana's concept of selective *sankofa*, that is, returning to one's root should offer a viable perspective, for the African context, in investigating and proposing a feasible political strategy that can better unify diverse ethnic groups toward progressive nation-building. Specifically, it is the author's view that the governmental structure of the Akan people of Ghana provides useful insight into authority, decentralization and *national* development.

In this paper, it is argued that the traditional Akan model of decentralization of authority, as against other models, is more conducive to nation-building and consequently national development through unification of its sub-groups. We propose that the same should be emulated and/or adapted by the postcolonial African, specifically Ghanaian, governance systems. The pertinent question this paper engages is how this can be achieved.

Part one critically analyzes the key concepts: nation, state, nation-building and decentralization of authority. The aim is to specify how exactly these concepts will be engaged in this paper. Part two discusses the problems of commensurability and implementation confronting multinational states as they pursue decentralization towards nation-building. Part three identifies and analyzes some principles that underlie the traditional Akan system of decentralized authority as a response to dealing with the problems of commensurability and implementation. Section four extrapolates the features of the traditional Akan model of decentralization of authority to the postcolonial African governmental systems. We conclude, ultimately, that the Akan model of decentralization offers a more viable alternative that facilitates nation-building for a multicultural and postcolonial African context.

To achieve the said target of this research, we employ critical textual analysis of philosophical works on the subject matter and critical analysis of information drawn from field research.

The notion of Nation-building

The term nation-building is better understood when the constitutive terms—state and nation—are given clarity. The term state has a broad as well as a narrow

interpretation. Its broad interpretation refers to any community or society of people with a common sense of purpose, and common historical and linguistic origin (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). But its narrow interpretation moves beyond the historical and linguistic parameters and construes a state as an entity with a manipulative force that ensures that all persons within it abide by its rules and laws (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020; Heywood, 2004:76; Gauba, 2009:134). In the words of Heywood, "The defining feature of the state is sovereignty, its absolute and unrestricted power.... The state commands supreme power in that it stands above all other associations and groups in society; its laws demand the compliance of all those who live within the territory" (Heywood, 2004:76). Gauba also writes, "In the light of the various definitions of the state, it is customary to identify the state by its constituent elements which include: population, territory, government and sovereignty" (Gauba, 2009:134). Atuire identifies the key element in the definition of a state as "sovereignty: 'complete self-sufficiency in the frames of a certain territory, that is, its supremacy in the domestic policy and independence in the foreign one'" (Atuire, 2019:2). All these definitions point to the fact that a state is imbued with a manipulative force that ensures that all persons within it abide by its rules and laws. The implication is that a state is a politico-legal and an autonomous institution with a restricted territory within which its influence is strongly felt. It is the politico-legal element that is missing in the first interpretation of the term state. Any subsequent reference to the term state, in this paper, should be understood in the second sense of the term which is the politico-legal institution.

Nation, just like state, has undergone a historical evolution right from the ancient Greek period to the modern period. Thus, while some scholars use the term in identical terms with the second sense of state, that is, a politico-legal entity, others refer to a nation as a community of persons with shared historical origin, cultural and linguistic background (Du Bois, 1970:75). The argument of the second group of scholars stems from the etymological meaning of the term 'nation'. The word is from the Latin noun "natio" meaning "birth" which in turn is derived from the Latin verb "nascere" which also means "to be born" (Frunda, 2005). The etymological meaning points to the historical origin or the common ancestry of a group of people. This is seen in Du Bois' conception of nation as:

a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life [emphases added] (Du Bois, 1970).

But Appiah debunks the definition of nation in terms of common/historical ancestry by referencing Du Bois' own dual ancestry. Appiah's point is that although Du Bois

has both Dutch and African ancestry, Du Bois is only identified with the Negro (African) race but not with the Teutonic race. If common ancestry were to be the determining ground of national identity, according to the logic of Appiah, Du Bois would have been both a Teutonic and a Negro. But since Du Bois is only of a Negro race but not a Teutonic race, common ancestry, in the view of Appiah, fails to be the distinctive or *necessary* feature of national identity (Appiah, 1992:31; Myles, 2013:147-164). As can be seen, common/historical ancestry is fundamental to national identity even though not sufficient. That is to say, additional condition(s) is needed to account for the identity of a nation. A common/historical ancestry, even if assumed, holds the values and beliefs as well as goals and ideals of the members of that nation. The urge that Du Bois' African ancestry has over his Dutch ancestry, in our view, is that 'binding force' inherent in his African ancestry. Atuire's view captures this point well where he argues that most nations possess *mythos*: beliefs or stories that lack scientific or historical precision (Atuire, 2019:11). The author maintains the view that 'every' nation not 'most' nations, has *mythos*. The *mythos* is the embodiment of the metaphysical underpinnings of a nation. These metaphysical underpinnings constitute the binding force through which people think of themselves as strongly interconnected with others; belonging together as members of a nation. This bond relates the present (living) to the past (dead) and the future (unborn). It is by this binding force that the Ewe of Ghana, for instance, forms a nation with the Ewe of Togo and the Ewe of Benin though each belongs to different states, that is, Ghana, Togo and Benin, respectively. In other words, the binding force forges the national identity. Consequently, the absence of this force implies the absence of a nation. To rehash Atuire's earlier claim, this binding force is beyond the remit of science, logic and reason though members of a nation are strongly submerged in this binding force either by conscious or unconscious effort. Hence, a nation in the second sense is more of a metaphysico-cultural entity than a politico-legal entity.

If the metaphysico-cultural concept of a nation is accepted, then it can be inferred that a nation(s) is the building block of a state. This will further imply that when a nation(s) achieves a politico-legal status that nation(s) metamorphoses into a state. A state can therefore be composed of a single nation—a 'nation-state' or a homogeneous state—or composed of multiple nations—multinational state or a heterogeneous state. It is in the multinational state that the question of nation-building, with respect to the 'devolution-type', becomes an eminently challenging question. This is discussed subsequently.

Nation-building, as seen earlier, requires a sense of shared aim and identity by the various peoples who constitute the state. But to forge a common identity and purpose within a multinational state where authority is

devolved to all the co-existing nations within the state seems a challenging task. Yet the traditional Akan system of devolution should be a viable model. Decentralization is discussed as an essential element of nation-building, especially in a multinational state, presently.

The notion of decentralization

Generally, decentralization of authority refers to a conscious or an intended shedding or transfers of a central government's powers and functions to lower-level institutions or local governments.ⁱ This concept hinges on the principle of subsidiarity which states that for effectiveness and efficiency, responsibilities or functions that can be undertaken by lower-level institutions must be ceded by the central government to those institutions. Atuire explains, "The principle states that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. It means reinforcing intermediate bodies within the political setting: these bodies are families, ethnic groups, associations of civil society" (Atuire, 2019:12-13).ⁱⁱ One of the rationales for decentralization (the principle of subsidiarity) is the fostering of mass participation in the administration of a government. It is argued that transferring of functions and responsibilities to lower-level institutions encourages local populace direct and active participation in the governance process since the populace well-identify with local governments than with central governments (Debrah, 2014:50-51).

The local populace, thus, become willing to contribute their efforts in the administration of their subnational region. And this, in effect, puts the activities of the central government under check.

However, the achievement of this aim depends on the extent to which the central government is decentralized. Does decentralization in any form bring about this effect? We do not think so. The view is held that the non-elected devolution type of decentralization is the best model to advance the object of decentralization. The subsequent discussions should offer the grounds for this view.

The meaning of devolution is contentious. Ribot understands the term in its broad sense by interpreting it as "...any transfer from central government to any non-central government body—including local elected governments, NGOs, customary authorities, private bodies and so forth" (Ribot, 2002: iii). Thus, he takes devolution as synonymous with decentralization. But Litvack et al and Rondinelli et al give a narrow interpretation of the term. It can be deduced from their respective views that devolution is a type of decentralization in which a central government transfers its authority or powers to autonomous local governments (Litvack et al., 1998:6; Rondinelli et al., 1983: 24-25).

Ribot rather refers to this second interpretation as

political or democratic decentralization.ⁱⁱⁱ It is the second interpretation, but not the first interpretation, that the term will be applied in this paper. Here also, the authority ranges from decision-making, revenue generation and territorial management. These local governments operate by the downward relation where they owe their primary allegiance to the subnational community but neither to the central government nor to themselves. In other words, the local government directly accounts for its actions and inactions to the local populace. Devolution, such understood, brings governance to the doorsteps of the local populace and ensures their active participation. The appointees are picked from and within the communities by the local populace themselves. Hence, Debrah describes devolution as the *authentic* form of decentralization (Debrah, 2014:53). It is important that we distinguish between two types of devolution: the first type where officials are elected and the second type where officials are non-elected. We refer to them as elected and non-elected devolution, respectively.

In the elected devolution, authorities are selected among the local populace through elections. This type is likely to lead to adversarial party-politics or create antagonism among the candidates and by extension among the local populace. A community engaged in factionist or adversarial party-politics has a high tendency of being ineffective in tackling the business of the community. Each faction could deploy schemes and techniques to obscure the progressive actions of their co-competitors. This kind of competition is unhealthy to the objectives of decentralization.

In non-elected devolution, on the other hand, authority is constituted by the community's traditional rulers with their council of elders. That is, authority is not attained through election but hereditarily (Sawyer, 1970:8). These are persons who are well revered and are considered to be well-informed about the challenges and successes of their respective communities. This type has a higher tendency of reducing, if not totally eradicating, factionism and rather promoting good governance and community progress.

Among all the types of decentralization, devolution is the one which has the highest propensity of encouraging active mass participation of a local populace in governance. The consequent issue to address is how non-elected devolution advances 'nation-building'. The Akan governmental system, from our research, is fashioned on the non-elected devolution model which, as we see it, continues to be successful in ensuring nation-building and should be adapted by modern post-colonial African states.

The Akan concept of decentralization of authority

According to Kwesi Wiredu and K. A. Busia, in Akan political theory, the ruler's power emanated from the

people. This power was held in trust for the people and the king only served as a mediator between the people and the ancestors (Wiredu, 2001; Busia, 1951). To this end, systems were put in place so that there will be grounds for removal of any ruler who went beyond his mandate. These systems also ensured that, though with the recognition of the hierarchical order, decision-making would be ultimately in the hands of the community. Kingship was viewed as a sacred office more than a political one so that even the king himself was subjugated and deposition of a chief reflected this position. This spiritual unity is what enabled the removal mechanisms of a chief from office to be possible in the event that progress stagnated in the lives of the people. The Akan believes that the state of affair is the concern of all the citizenry.

The ruler is put there to ensure that the will of the people is realized and so personal opinion's, including those of the leader, were kept for deliberative purposes only. The chief and a deliberating representative council of elders govern the system (Lauer, 2012). Due to the sacrosanct nature of the office of the chief and the underlying ancestral authority that legitimizes it, that sense of individuality of the chief is lost since he is in a sense not an ordinary person but "a vessel for his ancestors, a vessel of service for his people, now and in future generations" (Lauer, 2012:45).

However, freedom of expression was valued in this political engagement. The decision-making in this system was based on deliberation, which allowed for digressions. The small communities would usually summon its citizens to the marketplace to make decisions of a political nature while larger communities had elected representative chiefs of the different families and clans who counselled the paramount chief (Abotchie, 2006). The state was regarded as a tool of communal governance (Abraham, 2015:72-73). William Abraham puts it succinctly that for the purpose of reducing power-struggle so as to maintain social cohesion and stability, there was an established hierarchy of selected clans, amongst the lot, that formed the fabric of leadership of the Akan nation (Abraham, 2015:60-62).

The importance of hierarchy and decentralization can be seen here in the symbolism of the nuts of the oil palm which are closely bound, together but yet separate from another.

The Akan proverb: *Wisdom is not in the head of one person* also corroborates what has been said about the Akan decentralization paradigm and its political decision-making. Gyekye explains this proverb as prescribing consensus as the ideal procedure in political decision-making, in that, it underlines the need not only for acceptance of criticism and compromise, but also the need to respect the views of others (Gyekye, 1995). Consensus as used here is of a deliberative nature since the term is much more nuanced than used here. Barry Hallen explains that, "Consensus is therefore represented

as arising from intentional, negotiated, rational exchanges that are taken as a conventional part of everyday life" (Hallen, 2019:5).

Thus, traditional councils and assemblies have towed this line, that is, in the decision-making process in the community. The views and will of every member of the community were generally realized and compromises were made to arrive at a decision that is capable largely of satisfying everyone.

This is a system of political inclusion, and in pursuit of the traditional African socio-political value of communal harmony, an inclusion of the minority. A consensus approach invokes a psychological feeling of inclusion and a sense of belongingness in the political community (Gyekye, 1995:15-20). As Gyekye puts it, consensual politics required the majority not only to incorporate the ideas, perspectives and proposals of the minority but also the policy or measure that issued from the final deliberation would have resulted from nonpartisan voting. Participation and inclusion mean that the people ought to have a sense of running the affairs of the state and not just view it as an ivory tower (Gyekye, 2013: 245). This type of decentralization promotes nation-building. It found expression in lineages, clans, extended families and the township or paramountcy. Abraham captures this when he writes:

The political administration of the Akan state was done through ministerial chiefs. The chiefs were elected to cater for certain specialisms. Different chiefs were responsible for recitation, ceremony, publicity, the stool, graves, music, and administration of the capital, the royal household, the royal bodyguard, (and) the military. The Akan state was an orderly and settled state; riots were practically unknown as the political arrangements were ameliorative. Rebellions were naturally left to subject peoples, and much of the civic peace and contentment can be traced to the probably unique Akan divorce of rank and clan from power. Power was not oppressive of any class. The hierarchy of clan or rank could be different from that of power (Abraham, 2015:75, 77).

Further, although the state is made up of a plethora of clans, they are joined together, there is a feeling of responsibility for one another and the objective of governance was to benefit those who are governed. Despite the erosion of its importance today, there is a strong allegiance and respect of such traditional systems still at play, albeit at a smaller-scale.

For Gyekye, the Akan traditional state is still characterized by the devolution of certain aspects of the central government's authority to local authorities (Gyekye, 2013). He believes that this fosters nation-building and therefore proposes political decentralization as a remedy for resolving some of the current tensions in the diversities found among various peoples (Gyekye, 2013:171). Gyekye notes further that the chief could not exercise absolute power in the area of decision-making in

the state because decision-making was a joint effort. The ruler had to seek the advice of the representatives of the people, without which the ruler could be deposed. He describes it as a social contract whereby, "the injunctions submitted by the people to the chief and accepted by him constituted a kind of contract between them.

The chief or king was thus to hold power in trust for the people" (Gyekye, 1992: 243). This relationship is the principle underlying decentralization in the Akan system. By this, we mean that the nature of relation that exists between the people (lower-level institution) and the chief (central government) is what fostered decentralization and its benefits. It augurs for development and progress in the sense that with the active participation of the local populace in governance, they are able to bring on board their community-related challenges directly before the local government for redress (Debrah, 2014:49-50; Gyekye, 1997: 121).

What are the unique features of the indigenous Akan system of decentralization? A system of communal governance is displayed in the Akan political system where at each level in the community, a commission system is used in arriving at decisions. This committee includes representatives of the various families and clans to make up the representative council of elders. There was also the presence of the *asafo* to act as a form of check on the powers of the chief.^{iv} The *asafo* comprises, predominantly, young men who perform para-military, religious and political functions in most Akan societies (Datta and Porter, 1971:280; Li, 1995:329-330). These functions in the indigenous Akan settings are inseparable from one another; notwithstanding, our discussion will centre on the political functions of the *asafo*. This company was autonomous and was the political voice of the general populace to curtail the abuse of power. They were involved in both enstoolment and destoolment of chiefs, and other political decision-making (Owusu, 1989: 383).

The intricate system outlined in the foregoing describes a well thought out system that would have lessons for the current political order if subjected to critical examination and adaptation. How does the traditional Akan system of decentralized authority measure up in the light of the two pertinent problems associated with decentralization namely, commensurability and implementation?

The Akan system hinges on the principle of subsidiarity, and as explained, enables the local populace to feel a willingness to contribute their efforts in the administration of their various subnational regions (Atuire, 2019:12, 13). Due to the central government's decentralized system, there is direct involvement of the local populace, which helps them to check the activities and "dedicatedness" of the local government operations in the subnational region (Debrah, 2014: 53-54). Further, the non-elected devolution type of decentralization advances nation-building since authority is constituted by the community's traditional rulers with their council of elders who are considered to be abreast with their

respective community-specific challenges. The appointees are picked from within the communities by the local people themselves.

This structure, as can be seen, will help streamline postcolonial governance and its distribution of authority towards effective accountability. Lack of accountability arising from a lack of a well-structured decentralized system, in our view, is one major problem that leads to social fragmentation in African countries. The base, that is, the various ethnicities, are not well-strengthened for their synthesis into the power sharing strata of governance and this leads to dissatisfaction and political turmoil in most African countries.

Lessons for postcolonial multinational Africa

A significant question that was raised earlier in this discussion was how plausible it is for a 'multinational state to divest its authority, either in part or whole, to its sub-nations and still pursue the agenda of 'nation-building'. Postcolonial African states, Ghana for instance, have taken steps of decentralizing the authority of the central government. A point in view is Ghana's Local Government Act, 2016, (Act 936) which sheds the central government's political authority to lower-level institutions. The Act stipulates the transfer of certain political functions of the central government to the institutions of Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies (MMDAs). These functions involve raising revenue as in the case of the Internally Generated Fund and the general management of funds—District Assembly Common Fund, the Internally Generated Funds and donations etc.—towards the development of their various areas of jurisdiction (Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Article 124 and 125). More so, the MMDAs possess the right to promulgate bylaws which are subject to validation by the central government through the respective Regional Coordinating Councils headed by Regional Ministers (Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Article 181 and 182).

The Chief Executives, who are the heads of the MMDAs, by the Act, are government appointees and are representatives of the central government in their respective localities (Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Article 20). Though the Chief Executives, when appointed become semi-autonomous in their operations and are the agents of development in their distinct political jurisdictions, they owe their allegiance to the central government. This is in the sense that the central government reserves the sole right, though occasionally in consultation with Assembly members, to depose of any Chief Executive as the former deems fit.

It can therefore be inferred that the type of decentralization advanced in present-day Ghana is termed delegation. Delegation involves semi-autonomous lower-level institutions been ceded some of the central government's functions and powers. Though the institutions are partially independent, they are still

primarily accountable to the central government and secondarily to the subnational communities (Litvack et al., 1998:4, 5; Rondinelli et al., 1983: 19-20).^v

This type gives less room for populace participation and the concerns of the populace are only second to the demands of the central government. The allegiance and loyalty of the lower-level institutions are instead directed to the central government. But if decentralization is to allow more involvement of indigenes in governance and resolve community-specific predicaments, then the system must rather make the institutions primarily responsible to the indigenes, thus, the populace been involved in choosing or deposing their leaders. Failure to do so deflects the political system from achieving the set aim for establishing decentralization. Consequently, MMDAs are unlikely to be successful since it encourages the established institutions to affect the bidding of the central government almost to the neglect of that of the subnational communities.

The above discussion is not to imply that the 1992 Constitution of Republic of Ghana amended in 1996 makes no provision for the local chiefs (chieftaincy) in the governance of the state. Yet, it is worth noting that the early government systems of some postcolonial African states, of which Ghana is no exception, marginalized the role of traditional authorities/ chiefs in the administration of the state (van Wyk, 2007:14). Jo-Ansie van Wyk buttresses this point by writing that:

[Kwame] Nkrumah, for example, excluded the Asantehene and other traditional leaders from his government. In 1971, President Nimeiri of Sudan abolished the so called "native administration system" and replaced it with regional and area councils (van Wyk, 2007:14).

Such marginalization, if not addressed, weakens the effort towards nation-building since it is likely to instigate disgruntlement among the populace of the affected localities. Efforts have been made in recent times by some African states to involve traditional chiefs in the governance of their states. In the case of Ghana, the Chieftaincy Act, 2008, (Act 759), as enshrined in the constitution, recognizes chieftaincies as political institutions in their own rights, although barring chiefs from participating in mainstream or active politics. The Act establishes a National House of Chiefs and a Regional Houses of Chiefs in the various administrative regions of Ghana as well as Traditional Councils that cater for chieftaincy issues. Thus, Ghana although not seamless in its attempts at reconciling and learning from the traditional political structure, has made some progress along those lines (Erk, 2019: 471-472).

Nonetheless, the attempts to robe in the chiefs into governance, in this view, are inadequate if not insignificant and would have to be addressed. The local chiefs together with their respective constitutional institutions have been unduly limited in their functions in

the state. Their functions, as per the Chieftaincy Act, primarily border on streamlining, codifying and protecting customary laws of the various localities; and issues or conflicts pertaining stool property (Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Articles 3 and 9). Thus, the chiefs are actually not the main actors of development in their various communities. The chiefs could be consulted by MMDCEs with respect to developmental projects or agenda. Even so, it is not mandatory for the chiefs to be consulted on any project taken within the MMDAs since the latter's primary commitment remains with the central government.

The appointments of Chief Executives on political party lines— by the central government—mostly breed political polarization or antagonism in their localities which often results in distrust and dissatisfaction between the Assembly and a fraction of the populace (political opponents). As already hinted, such an unhealthy relationship within a state will most probably retard efforts towards nation-building.

One may propose, by way of solution to the above, that the authority of the MMDCEs be made an elected office, that is, the indigenes or the general populace must be equipped with the right to elect and depose MMDCEs when the need be. A case in view is the proposal made by some section of Ghanaians to substitute the model of central government nominating MMDCEs for the model of the populace electing MMDCEs (Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). The shift is meant to remove the Chief Executives from the direct control of the central government in order to make the former primarily responsible to the general populace since the populace will possess the power to elect or depose Chief Executives when necessary. This proposal aligns with the elected type of devolution. Though it gives power back to the people, it has high propensity, as afore-discussed, to generate adversarial politics which is detrimental to nation-building or the growth of a society.

For these challenges and in line with the concept of selective *sankofa*, it is recommended that MMDAs be substituted for the local chiefs with its chieftaincy system. The Chieftaincy Act defines a chief as one “hailing from the appropriate family and lineage, has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage” (Constitution of Ghana, 1992, Articles 26). It is inferable from this that a Chief is one who shares in and is inextricably intertwined with the metaphysico-historical perspective of their communities or nations. The chief's appointment is not the prerogative of the central government and so he is primarily committed to his community than to the central government. Such commitment most often than not earns the chief the trust of his subjects. Comparatively, MMDCEs are not necessarily aborigines of the communities in which they serve but their appointment hinges on, as political party members, the

extent of their loyalty to the central government.

It is not implicative from the above that the Akan indigenous chieftaincy system is unblemished. Some chiefs sometimes detract from their basic commitments to their localities; focusing on their personal gains or illegitimate activities. But as already noted, the Akan governmental structure has effective built-in mechanisms to purge the system of such abhorrent activities. For instance, the *asafo* company has the right to initiate the procedure for the destoolment of chiefs whose activities are deemed to be in violation of the oath of their office. The *asafo* is autonomous and acted as safeguards of the interests of the people so that power abusers were effectively put in check (Owusu, 1989:383). This political function of the *asafo* is so essential that not even the council of elders could ignore the proposal of the *asafo* company. This is so in that the voice of the *asafo*, as noted, represents the voice of the common or general populace.

Aside from the political influence of the *asafo*, the council of elders also reserves the right to reprimand and even destool a chief who disregards the customary laws or violates the oath of his office. These checks and balances are indicative of mass participation in the Akan indigenous authority. This system of political inclusion promotes a sense of belongingness and dedication of the common people or populace in the affairs of their society. The contribution of a populace's sense of belonging to their respective nations towards nation-building cannot be downplayed in a multinational-state. It is by this that the concept of unity-in-diversity can be made meaningful since intra-nation harmony is a necessary condition for nation-building in especially a multinational-state.

Anticipated challenges and responses

One may argue that devolving authority to traditional rulers detracts from the project of nation building in a multinational-state. The idea is that empowering the chiefs could redirect the trustworthiness and commitment of the general populace to the chiefs as against the central government. The probable implication would be that these nations may develop disinterest in the nation-building agenda for the fear of losing much of its culture, heritage and national identity. This therefore may jeopardize the agenda of nation-building at the state level.

To respond to this criticism, Atuire's proposition of creation of *mythos* will be adapted at the state level. Considering the binding force of the *mythos*, there is the need for a state-level *mythos* that will serve as the rallying point for all constituent nations within the state. This is not to imply that the constituent nations ought to lose touch with their various *mythos*. But rather, that is to say that there will be a two-level *mythos*, that is, one that exists at the nation-level and that which will exist at the

state-level. The former preexists and serves as the model for the latter. The nation-level *mythos* will ensure the commitment and active participation of the commoners in the affairs of their respective nations while the state-level *mythos* caters for the spirit of oneness through the various chiefs to their respective followers or masses until the state attains a sense of genuine nationhood. In this sense, the project of nation-building will be kept alive while each nation will have a firm hold of their metaphysico-cultural underpinnings of their nations. The point is that it is only when the substructures, various nations, are well founded; that the superstructure, nation-building at the state-level, can be firmly erected.

Another anticipated challenge against non-elected devolution is that it is likely to create struggle among lower-level governments in accessing the limited funds of the central government. This problem is termed the 'common pool' problem (Treisman, 2007:15). The identified problem signals how local government may drain the coffers of the central government (which is commonly available to each subnational region) at the expense of other local governments, and to some extent, to the detriment of the central government. The struggle among local governments to access the state coffers seems unhealthy for nation-building. We respond that each subnational government takes charge of its resources: internally generated fund and natural resources. That notwithstanding, the central government ought to put measures in place to ensure that a stipulated percentage of revenue accumulated at the subnational government is paid into the coffers of the central government periodically; not only to support the central government's projects across the state but also to support less resourced subnational governments.

Conclusion

The discussion of how the governmental structure of the Akan people of Ghana has provided insight into how decentralization and authority is wielded and how it can facilitate nation-building in contemporary African states if adapted to suit circumstances of the times.

It is apparent that traditional authority still plays an important role in people's lives due to their concretized legitimacy. The Akan principle of politics of inclusion, as has been argued is not antithetical to nation-building, but rather instantiates a high level of decentralization for the promotion of nation-building.

The intuition of Erk was shared when he argues that Botswana has an unbroken line that allowed traditional authorities to strengthen their pre-existing social and political legitimacy from pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial times (Erk, 2019). The Akan and similar African political systems have had a tumultuous journey in this respect. Due to lack of and little recognition and co-option, these systems have suffered. Various attempts at decentralization have been made in an attempt to

reconcile the indigenous chieftaincy establishment with the modern African government system.

However laudable these initiatives are, there is more to be done in order to achieve the sense of belongingness that was apparent in the indigenous Akan political system in multinational postcolonial Africa. It must be acknowledged that this discussion is not an attempt to adopt or go back wholesale to how things were in Africa's traditional past since the Akan indigenous system was far from perfect. This is a proposal to learn from and implement, where possible and viable, values of the system that led to progress and political inclusion so as to engender an enabling atmosphere for nation-building to thrive in postcolonial African democracies.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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ⁱ Different institutions may undergo decentralization. For instance, banking or any business firm may decentralize its powers or authority to its sub-branches. In this project, decentralization will only be considered in terms of the governance of a state and the distribution of part of its authority to lower-level institutions.

ⁱⁱ In subsequent paragraphs, we engage, to some extent, detailed discussion on the institutions that should receive the decentralized functions and powers of the central government.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ribot seems to focus on the kind of authority transferred to lower-level institution to distinguish among the types of decentralization. But this paper makes use of the inclusive or interwoven sense of the term decentralization.

^{iv} The term *asafo* is Fanti-specific and its cognate term among the Asante is *nmerante* (Datta and Porter, 1971: 280). Other Akan groups have various ways of expressing the term under discussion.