



2nd February 2022.

Ethnicity and Traditional Rivalries – A source of tension and destabilization of Republican Ghana

1. In recent times, inter- and intra-traditional chieftaincy disputes, land boundary & title disputes and inter-ethnic rivalry for dominance, power and control over the Ghanaian State have become the major threats to the existence of our unitary republican state. If this trend is not checked, may lead to the fragmentation and dissolution of our unitary republican state. Against the background of a deteriorating socio-economic situation, extreme polarization of the body politic and regime capture of some neutral state institutions, communal tensions have increased by leaps and bounds. It is also within this context that the internecine ethnic conflict in Bawku over chieftaincy and the present bad blood between the traditional authorities of Ashanti and Dormaa involving diatribes and name-calling are of grave national security concern. The resultant dwindling of confidence in democracy and its dividend would require prompt action to de-escalate social and ethnic tensions in order not to compromise national unity and peace.
2. It would be admitted that the current germs which became and continue to be Achilles heel of unhealthy rivalry and seemingly threatening our unitary republican status was first planted in the Ghana Independence Constitution of 1957 through the retention of the roles of the chieftaincy institutions. In that Constitution, the office of chief as existing by customary law and usage was guaranteed and provided “with the power to consider and offer advice on any matter referred to it by Minister or the Assembly”. It also provided for a House of Chiefs to be established under an Act of Parliament for each administrative region existing then and further elevated Asantehene over other chiefs throughout the newly independent country when it came to the administrative running of the regions by stating “there will be head of each Region who shall for Ashanti be the Asantehene and for the other Regions a person chosen by the House of Chiefs”. To further consolidate the role of the chieftaincy institutions, the Constitution also placed a number of procedural limitations on the National Assembly ‘affecting the status and functions of chiefs’ and regarding ‘altering regional boundaries and names of regions.’
3. But, this is understandable in that the 1957 Independence Constitution was crafted under a constitutional monarchy with H.M. Queen Elizabeth II as head of state. It should also be stressed that the matter which complicated the constitutional arrangement was the fact that prior to independence the country we know today as Ghana was not a single, constitutional unit but rather four distinct areas. We had the Gold Coast and Ashanti Crown Colonies which were part of Her Majesty's dominions; the Northern Territories (a British Protectorate) and British Togoland (a United Nations Trust Territory) which were not part of Her Majesty's dominions. To bring the two other areas to dominion status, the colonial authorities first had to pass legislation terminating the agreements with the native chiefs in the Northern Territories on which the protectorate status was based. Then, a referendum was held with respect to British Togoland ‘to determine the consent of its people to being united with the rest of what would become Ghana’. In so doing, all the constituent areas ‘became part of Her Majesty's dominions’ as a single, unified dominion named Ghana.
4. By 1960, the people of Ghana in a referendum overwhelmingly rejected any form of constitutional monarchy and its feudal appendages. Instead, it promulgated a new Constitution declaring Ghana as a



SOCIALIST MOVEMENT OF GHANA (SMG)

sovereign unitary republic where the powers of the State are enshrined in the people of Ghana without distinction of sex, race, tribe, religion or political belief. In other words, the people created a republic of equal citizens in which ‘every citizen of Ghana should receive his or her fair share of the produce yielded by the development of the country’ and not subjugated to any royalty as bondsmen or subjects. All the same, the Chieftaincy institution was guaranteed and preserved with a House of Chiefs for each Region and consisting of ‘such Chiefs as may be provided by law’. However, their roles and functions were clipped with regard ‘to customary law and other matters’. It is this singular act that completely diminished in the Republican Constitution the elevated position and role of the Asantehene in the 1957 Constitution.

5. It is this republican state which is now being undermined by certain backward forces of progress which have pretensions to restore monarchy and become overlords of the State of Ghana. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that the assaults on the republican status of Ghana have not ceased since 1960 culminating in various amendments to various chieftaincy Acts. Most of these amendments sought to legitimize the intrusion of the chieftaincy institutions into the governance space of the state.

6. The current effusions against the founder of our Republic, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, by the Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II regarding the Ashantis should therefore be understood within the foregoing context. Clearly this is shocking and not borne out by the facts of our political history. We call on the people of this country to disregard these mystifications as distractions from the true reasons fueling the current misunderstanding between the two traditional areas.

7. Of course, the main problem underpinning the recent happenings is somehow masked by a resort to past glory and pre-colonial wars of conquests. This latitude has now been extended into the arena of such caustic issues of who were subjects or vassals of whom; pedestrian at best and inimical to our unity as one people with the same destiny and an affront to our republican status. It is now taking a dangerous and frightening tribal chauvinistic stance with mushrooming tribal groupings, bodyguards and bloggers getting into the fray and openly trading insults and threatening the peace and unity of this country.

8. The current competition for ethnic dominance, power brokerage and control directed at undermining of the Ghanaian Republican State may be explained by several intertwining factors. One of such factors is the fait accompli restoration of the Asante Confederacy in the form of renewal of oaths to the present occupant of the golden stool. This particular act came to strengthen the hands of Asantehene to begin elevating pre-colonial chiefs of old Asante who were located outside current boundaries of Ashanti region into paramountcy and in extensor expanded his territorial space. It also enabled the Asantehene to have access to the new gold rush areas of Ahafo centered on Kenyasi. Taking a cue from this Asante success, there was an upsurge of countervailing forces which led to the re-emergence of Bono-Techiman based on the medieval state of Bonoman and the rise of Fori-Panyin House of Akyem Abuakwa after the latter’s state council meeting in 2015.

9. The other factor is the insincerity of political parties and their pursuit of hegemony that created dual power situations whereby additional powers became available and assigned to chieftaincy institutions through executive, legislative and constitutional instruments. The resultant effect of some of these laws was the reintroduction and imposition on our society of backward feudal privileges and rule. One classic

www.smghana.org

P.O. Box NT 272, Accra – Newtown Accra



SOCIALIST MOVEMENT OF GHANA (SMG)

example is the relocation or placement of few regional stool lands and their secretariats under selected traditional councils and subsequent assignment of oversight land use management to various overlords. The net effect of this phenomenon is the current mass conversion of community property into private property of overlord chiefs.

10. Also, there has been occasions of political parties pandering to traditional power bases through extra-budgetary funding and financing of selected traditional stools. Funding by the National Petroleum Authority (NPA) of certain selected traditional councils is a case in point. Certain actions of the present NPP government, since 2017, has furthered the unrelenting the attack on our republic. These included the removal of esteemed 1st day of July as a national day of the republic and the elevation of 7th January as Constitution Day. Fragmentation of four hitherto stable, united regions (Brong Ahafo, Northern, Volta and Western) into pre-colonial medieval entities namely Ahafo, Bono, Bono East, Savana, North, North-East, Oti, Volta, Western and Western North is another example which launched frontal assault on our sovereign unitary republic. It has opened up the hitherto peaceful and unified country for unhealthy inter-ethnic hegemonic rivalry, land and traditional boundary disputes.

11. We of the Socialist Movement of Ghana condemn unreservedly these unwarranted altercations by the fraternal ethnic groups against each other. We also regret the attempt to distort the unity of the state and the equality of citizens bequeathed to our nation Ghana by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. We call on the chiefs to cease all unnecessary invectives and longing for the dark days of yore which is long gone and will never come.

Long Live the Republic of Ghana

Contact Persons:

Justice Akuffo-Henaku

Justice Akuffo-Henaku

+233 24 437 3622

For General Secretary.

Blaise Tulo Jnr

+233 54 934 2342

www.smghana.org

P.O. Box NT 272, Accra – Newtown Accra