

LANGUAGE, CULTURE, ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION: THE TOGO EXPERIENCE SINCE 1900

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the linguistic, cultural and ethnic composition of the present Republic of Togo. The country is a multilingual and multicultural nation-state. Colonial political, economic and cultural policies between 1900 and 1960 accentuated the ethnic differences. Ethnic consciousness in the form of complaints and protests, particularly against the arbitrary partition of formerly homogeneous groups, was confined to the Ewe, a Kwa linguistic group. From 1960, more ethnic groups became conscious of their socio-economic and political deprivations within the new nation-state. Thus ethnic strife became more pervasive. The result was the formation of ethnic-based political associations, which invariably led to political instability. The paper concludes that national integration becomes difficult under such ethnic struggle for control of political power within the state.

Key Words: Togo; Language; Culture; Ethnicity; Integration.

INTRODUCTION

Integration of all social group into a united entity is the goal of all modern nation-states. However, while the process is relatively easier in monolingual and monocultural states, it is one of the greatest problems for most multilingual and multicultural nations, particularly in Africa. This is due to the fact that these African nations were created by European colonial powers from diverse linguistic and cultural ethnic groups. As a result of unequal access to social and economic opportunities, the struggle for political power, the key to those opportunities, was conducted from the basis of ethnic interest during the colonial and post-colonial periods. This certainly hampered the process of integration.

It is difficult in a short paper such as this to attempt a detailed clarification of the concepts of language, culture and ethnicity. It is enough to say that language is the most dominant element of group identity. Consequently, it is the major instrument of interaction as well as transmitting and preserving sentiments, emotions and thoughts. Language is also the vehicle of historical traditions. Culture in its simple form is manifested in the type and quality of socio-political institutions as well as thoughts and ideas, either secular or spiritual, emanating from them. Both language and culture can be used to identify a people or a society. Consequently, in its primordial setting, a group or community with a common language, culture, history and territory forms an ethnic group or a nation. When such a group is brought under a larger political entity as in a contemporary nation-state, it becomes a sub-nation (Rustow, 1968; Peterson, 1975).

In pre-colonial Africa, ethnic exclusivity was a common phenomenon. How-

ever, with the subjugation of existing ethnic groups under a central colonial administration as well as the introduction of foreign linguistic and cultural values, a new ethnic consciousness emerged. This new phenomenon is often referred to as ethnicity. There is no consensus as to the actual characteristics of ethnicity. While Afigbo (1985) sees it as a matter of sentiment or emotion, Nnoli (1978) maintains that it is "behavioural in form and conflictual in context." Whatever its characteristics, it is intended to protect not only the linguistic and cultural values but also economic and political interests of one ethnic group vis-a-vis another. It is this protective and inward-looking nature that creates the problem of integration for a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous state.

The purpose of this paper is to show how linguistic, cultural and ethnicity factors impeded the process of national integration in the Republic of Togo, one of the modern nation states in the West African sub-region. The discussion is in three thematic sections. The first identifies the language and culture groups that inhabited Togo and the nature of relations that existed among them before the advent of Europeans. Then we examine the causal factors for the type of ethnicity that emerged during the colonial period. This is then followed by an analysis of post independence dimensions of ethnicity and its effect on the process of integration in that country.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE GROUPS

The present Republic of Togo emerged from the larger portion of the former German Togoland, which was granted to France as a League of Nations mandated territory in 1922 (Lasisi, 1985). It has an area of 56,600 km². with a population of about two million people. In spite of the small size, it has over fifty different ethnic groups and dialects (Cornevin, 1962). This multiethnic feature is generally characteristic of Africa south of the Sahara. For example, Greenberg (1970) and Alexandre (1972), have at different times suggested that this portion of Africa has about 800 languages. Out of this number, Ladefoged (1968) estimates that there are over 500 languages in West Africa. According to Greenberg's genetic classification of African languages, the Togolese dialects belong to one of the four major language families of the continent. This is the Niger-Congo/Kordofanian phylum which is the largest linguistic stock of Negro Africa. This phylum has eight subgroups. Two are found in Togo. They are the Voltaic or the Gur to the north of latitude $8\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ and the Kwa to the south of that line. The former group consists of the Kabri, Losso, Bassari, Konkomba, Tyokossi and Dagomba speaking people. The latter group is comprised of the Evhe (Ewe), Mina, Aja, Fon, Ana (Yoruba) Adangbe and Akposso.

The language groups are not exclusive cultural units. This is because there are similarities in religious beliefs, cosmology and economic activities across language groups. Most of the people inhabiting the country were, during the pre-colonial period, of the traditional African religion except among some of the Evhe-speaking people, where Christianity had been introduced before 1900, and among the Dagomba and Kotokoli, where Islam existed since 1700. Only in the political

organisation are differences observed. Consequently, there are two political cultural groups. The first are the ministates or segmentary societies. The other are the megastates or centralized polities. This classification does not follow the language groups. For instance the former category is found mostly among the southern Gur-speaking people of Konkomba, Kabri (Froelich, 1963; Patokideou, 1969) Losso and Bassari as well as among some Kwa-speaking groups. In the same way, the centralised political systems are found among the Kotokoli, Tyokossi, Dagomba and Mamprusi of the north, and the Evhe, Mina, Fon and Ana of the south.

The main feature of the centralised system is that political authority is in the hands of either priest-Kings as among the Mina and Kotokoli or hereditary monarchs, as it is the case of the Evhe, Ana and Dagomba. In contrast, political authority is more diffused among the segmentary societies while social and religious activities in the form of age-grades and ancestral worship are dominant. More important is the fact that the sense of territoriality is more developed among centralised communities than those of the segmentary.

In spite of differences in language and culture, cognitive specificity and ethnic solidarity arising out of them, there were inter-group cultural and commercial links before the advent of colonial rule. This is apart from similarity in religio-cosmological beliefs and kinship systems (Busia, 1967) noted earlier. Colonial rule introduced new socio-political and economic structures and values which in turn produced new patterns of expectations and ethnic solidarity in the form of ethnic associations and progressive unions.

COLONIAL RULE AND ETHNICITY

European colonialism in Africa was undoubtedly motivated by economic considerations necessitated by the expansion of industrial capitalism. However, colonialism was more fundamentally a cultural phenomenon (Oloruntimehin, 1974). This is because the administrative systems, economic policies and socio-religious values associated with colonialism were elements of the European culture being adapted to the African environment. This imposed foreign culture was given a territorial structure which encompassed the existing ethnic groups. Such a development was bound to create tensions and conflicts between the indigenous and the foreign cultures. However, the dialectical situation that emerged marked the beginning of the transformation of the existing autonomous fatherlands (nations) into sub-nations within a modern nation-state.

The process was started in Togo by the Germans in July 1884, when they signed a treaty with King Mlapa of Toago, the priest king of the Mina ethnic group. Following this, Mina district and the rest of the coast was declared the Protectorate of Togoland (Schutzgebiet Togo). Togo is an indigenous Evhe name. Its adoption is significant because it created a sense of belonging for most of the Kwa groups right from the start. This contrasted with most parts of Africa during the same period where the colonial states were given foreign names.

The extension of German rule into the interior brought the first open tension and conflict between the indigenous and foreign cultures. Unlike the Kwa peoples

along the coast who accepted German rule without any resistance, the Gur inhabitants resisted it. They saw the German presence as an intrusion into their cultural areas. The Germans had to undertake several military expeditions into the area before those people were pacified (Cornevin, 1969). The next step taken by the Germans was to give the new protectorate definite boundaries. Towards this end, between 1885 and 1907, Germany signed a series of agreements with the French in the east and the British in the west (Hertslet, 1967). The boundaries agreed upon gave the protectorate about 50 km of coastline (between the present Benin Republic and Ghana) and a hinterland that extended between 6° and 11° North parallels. This gave a total area of about 86,000 km². It was within this area that Germany in the period 1884–1914 implanted some of the elements of her culture (Fig. 1). These included the imposition of a paternalistic and autocratic ad-

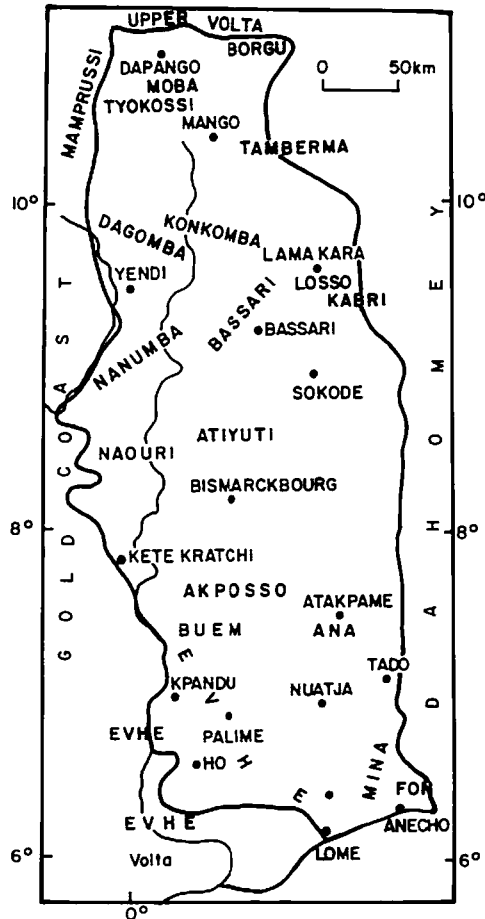


Fig. 1. German Togoland : distribution of ethnic groups 1884–1914.

ministrative system, construction of roads and railways, the introduction of new legal and educational systems and a market economy based on the exportation of cash crops and importation of European industrial artefacts. These activities had the consequence of encouraging the development of a multi-cultural nation-state.

It is pertinent to point out that this development was not intended by Germany. This was because Germany, like all other colonial powers in Africa during that period, was in Togoland only to establish a colonial estate that would be exploited in order to develop the German nation. Besides this inherent contradiction, there were other disintegrating factors, such as the arbitrary boundaries that cut across areas and the concentration of social and education facilities in the south.

This was the situation when World War I broke out in Europe in August 1914. Since Britain and France were fighting against Germany in that continent, the war was extended to the German colonies in Africa and elsewhere. This was a normal practice in European imperialist history since the 17th century when war in Europe provided an opportunity to attack the enemy's overseas territories as a means of expanding existing empires. In view of this, Togoland was attacked from 7th August by both the British and French forces. The Germans were forced to surrender within 18 days of the joint invasion. Thereafter, the territory was partitioned provisionally on 30th August 1914. However, as a result of the complaints of the French about the inequity of that exercise, another partition was agreed upon on 10th July 1919 (JORF, 1921). Each of the power's portion of the former Togoland became a mandated territory (Fig. 2). The British share was less than two-fifth while the remainder went to the French (RBMG, 1924). In compliance with Article 9 of the British mandate, British Togo was administered as an integral part of the Gold Coast. Although France also had the same power in her own portion, she preferred to administer it as a separate entity from Dahomey.

The French mandate administration which began in 1922 continued and expanded the administrative, economic and social policies first introduced by the Germans. Nonetheless, they were executed in the style and method characteristic of French colonial tradition. For example, French replaced German as the official language of administration and of education. There were certain differences between the new French Togo and the former German Togoland as well as among Togo and the other French colonies. For instance, French Togo was not an exclusive colonial estate of France as Togoland was to Germany (Lasisi, 1987). Instead, it was regarded as a distinct entity in international law and a place where France could not pursue the policy of assimilation as in her existing colonies in West Africa (CPM, 1922).

Nonetheless, the contradictions implicit in colonialism since the German period now came into the open under the French rule. For example, while the rudiments of a united political entity under a single government continued to be strengthened, there was a reduction in the territorial extent of what used to be German Togoland. More important was the fact that the new boundary between the two Togos split all the existing culture groups along it, which was more than the former Anglo-German boundary did. This was further aggravated by the differences in the administrative and fiscal policies on the two sides of the boundary. Those mostly affected were the Evha, Buem, Akposso, Konkomba and Tyokossi.

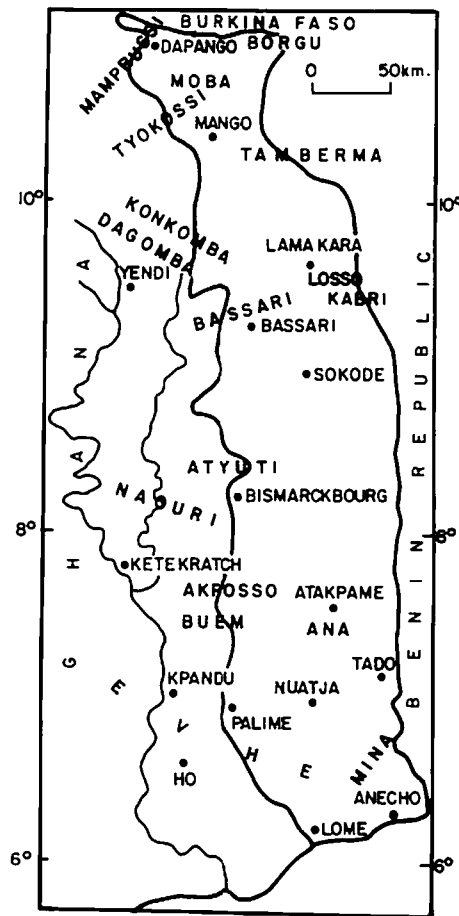


Fig. 2 Republic of Togo : Distribution of ethnic groups after the partition of 1919.

It was these factors that encouraged fresh ethnic consciousness first among one of the Kwa groups. Thereafter, the reactions of the other groups against Kwa consciousness produced a pervasive ethnicity. The Evhe were the first to demonstrate ethnic solidarity. It was set off by the arbitrary boundary which not only divided them politically but also disrupted the economic unity created in their area by the German transportation systems. That ethnic consciousness was further strengthened by the fact that the Evhe had become associated with European culture through Christianity and Western education even before the imposition of formal colonial rule (Faure, undated). This provided them with the German language through which they could forcefully express their grievances.

These circumstances explain why right from 1919, when the boundary was agreed upon by France and Britain, the Evhe sent their protests to both the British

Government and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States of America (CPM, 1938). This was followed by constant complaints at the meetings of the Councils of Notables in French Togo for the rectification of the boundary, which according to one Evhe leader, Pastor Baeta, was fixed "without considering their interests" (ANT, 1923). Although the first French Commissioner for Togo, Louis Woelffel, agreed that the boundary actually "brise les liens familiaux de population de meme race" (ANT, 1920), the French government generally felt that the issue was a British problem.

In British Togo, on the other hand, the negative effects of the boundary on the Evhe on that side of the boundary were publicised in the press both locally and internationally (West Africa, 1935). This forced the British to include the Evhe question in many of their annual reports to the League of Nations (RBMG, 1924, 1927, 1936, 1938). The British, however, insisted on several occasions that the boundary had not fragmented the Evhe because the Evhe had ceased to be a centralised state since the 17th century. The Council of the League of Nations agreed with this view when it concluded in 1939 that "le trace de la frontiere entre les deu terriottes voisins sous mandat ne portait aucune atteinte a la vie organique de la population Ewe" (Journal Officiel, 1939: 106).

It is true that since the different Evhe groups migrated out of Notsie in the 17th century, they had not lived under a single state but in several mini-states. However, they are still bound by common ancestry, language and culture. From what we have said earlier, this qualified the whole group as a nation. The British and the League of Nations imposed an European 20th century political culture which believed that only a society with a centralised government can be or claim to have been partitioned (Asiwaju, 1984).

The Evhe reaction against the imposed boundary can be regarded as a form of nationalism since it was a demand for the return to the pre-colonial fatherland. This phenomenon entered into a more complex phase during and after World War II. This complexity arose from the usual "built-in dialectic" within all nationalism (Fishman, 1972). However, in the case of the Evhe the dialectics among its elements did not recharge the dynamism of the movement. This was because the goals sought by the different groups were irreconcilable. Those Evhe in British Togo, for example, wanted the unification of the Evhe in the two Togos. Towards this end, they formed the Togoland Congress in 1949. On the other hand, the Evhe in the Volta delta of the Gold Coast who had been ruled by the British since the partition of December 1885, favoured the unity of all Evhe people under the British tutelage (Ewe News Letter, 1946). This group, supported by some of the Evhe elite in French Togo, formed the All-Ewe Conference.

Evhe nationalism produced counter reactions not only from the Gur groups in the two Togos but also from the Gold Coast administration. Some of these groups, particularly the Dagomba, wanted the boundary to remain as it was since 1919. The reason for this was that the boundary had reunited their pre-colonial state. The reunification of the two Togos was to them, therefore, unnecessary. The British and, later, Kwame Nkrumah, for quite different reasons, opposed the detachment of Togo from the Gold Coast. The British objection was based on the economic interest of controlling the whole of the lower valley of Volta River.

Nkrumah's opposition emanated from his ideological conviction that the first step towards a successful Pan-Africanism was to create mega-states rather than small entities such as the two Togos (Daily Times, 1963). Under such circumstance, it is not surprising that both the British and Nkrumah supported and encouraged the All-Ewe Conference and the Dagomba. This encouragement resulted in the United Nations organised plebiscite of May 1956, in British Togo. Majority of those who voted for integration of that territory with the Gold Coast came from the Gur-speaking areas of the north. The integration marked the end of any hope of the unification of all the Evhe under a single state.

These circumstances produced a pervasive ethnic strife in French Togo. The first reason for this is that the Evhe leaders in the territory then realised that the Evhe leaders in the territory then realised that if they were to continue to enjoy their privileged political and economic positions, they should start to advocate the integration of all ethnic groups in a new state that would be confined to the French mandated territory. The other reason is that the agitation for an all-Evhe unification together with the concentration of social and physical infrastructures in the Kwa areas had created an awareness on the part of the other ethnic groups of their deprived position. This was buttressed by the fact that the Evhe in particular had been monopolising whatever economic and political opportunities the mandate administration afforded the indigenous peoples. A good example of this situation is that the Evhe controlled the first political organisations in the territory: "Comite d'Union Togolais (C.U.T.)" and "Parti Togolais du Progres (P.T.P.)." The ethnic consciousness, latent though it was, that all these conditions produced was openly encouraged by the French. This they did by being instrumental in the formation of a political organisation made entirely of northern peoples' called "Union des Chefs et des Populations du Nord." The French took this step because they detested the support which the Evhe leaders, such as Augustino da Souza and Sylvanus Olympio, had hitherto been giving to the pro-British, All-Ewe Conference. At the same time the French also encouraged the Evhe leaders to continue to concentrate their political activities in Togo. This they did by accelerating the territory's movement towards self government and then independence. But the French action may also be explained by the necessity to reduce the criticism of their policies in Togo at the United Nations and at the same time prevent its possible absorption by the Gold Coast (Pepy, 1958).

Since there was no autonomous regional administrative and political structures as it was the case in Nigeria during the same period, the struggle in the 1950s was for the control of the central political power. However, as a result of the relative "backwardness" of the Gur peoples, arising from the inequitable distribution of socio-economic benefits under the French rule, these northern peoples were marginalised in the struggle. Therefore, the contest for dominance was between the Evhe-controlled political parties—C.U.T. and P.T.P. The latter won the majority of seats in the territorial Assembly elections in 1950. In 1956, its leader, Nicholas Grunitzky, was appointed Prime Minister. Power changed hands in 1958 when Sylvanus Olympio, the C.U.T. leader, won the elections held in April of that year. It was under Olympio's leadership that the territory obtained independence as the Republic of Togo on 27th April 1960.

INTER-ETHNIC COMPETITION SINCE 1960

With independence, the French paternalistic moderating influence in the country was removed. But the socio-economic and political inequalities among and between the different language and culture groups which the French rule had created remained. At independence, therefore, one can say that there was a mal-integration of the diverse ethnic groups within the new state. What was needed to reduce the scale of existing ethnicity which had arisen from group aspiration as well as the feeling of deprivation and marginalisation was to design social and economic policies that would reduce the inequalities. The new government, however, did not improve the situation. Its political and economic policies further divided the ethnic groups. Consequently, not only were some members of the President's own ethnic group embittered, but also the desire of the northern groups to have an equitable share of the political power was sharpened. The feasibility of realising this desire was proved by the fact that although the northern groups had only very few Western-educated men both in government and the private sector, they dominated the rank and file of the national army. This was the consequence of the German and French policies of restricting the recruitment of colonial soldiers to the Kabri, Losso, Bassari and Kotokoli.

A situation thus ensued in which the Kwa group led by the Evhe controlled the government, the bureaucracy and the economy while the Gur people dominated the army. The tension thus created which had been inchoate during the colonial period culminated in the military coup of 13th January 1963 in which President Olympio was killed (Daily Times, 1963). Nicholas Grunitzky was appointed as the next President but he had no real control over the army nor the country beyond the small coastal region. Consequently, he was forced to surrender power back to the army exactly four years later on 13th January 1967 (Daily Sketch, 1967). Lt. Col. Etienne Eyadema, now General Gnassingbe Eyadema, a Kabri, assumed the leadership of the nation. His explanation of why the army took control of political power confirms what has been said above about the tension within the nation. According to him, the army returned in order to prevent "a psychosis of imminent civil war" in the nation (Daily Times, 1967).

Eyadema has remained in power since 1967. He has established a one party state under the Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais. This was after the proscription of all the existing political parties. Besides, all identified opponents who were mostly Evhe, were arrested and put into prison (ANT, 1985). Expectedly, he has continued to favour his own language and culture group in his government and in the distribution of social and economic infrastructures. These policies may have been calculated to bring political stability. However, they have further hampered the process of national integration. For example, his attempt to redress the imbalance of the past by favouring his own ethnic and related groups in the utilisation and allocation of national resources, produced opposition from those who had done the same when they were in power. The opposition was manifested in several unsuccessful attempts organised mostly by Evhe political exiles outside Togo with the sole purpose of toppling him. The twentieth of such attempts was that of 23rd September 1986, in which the capital Lomé was invaded by armed soldiers from

Ghana (Daily Times, 1986). Thus the problem of welding the different ethnic groups into a nation with one common aspiration and destiny remains as it had been since the colonial period. This is in spite of Eyadema's long rule.

CONCLUSION

The problem of national integration was initially created for Togo by the European cultural phenomenon in the form of colonialism. This was because colonialism created a contradiction within the territory. While it brought people of different languages and cultures together within a common territorial framework and political administration, it also introduced new socio-economic values and needs. The disruption that these elements inflicted on existing linguistic and cultural homogeneity created, in varying degrees, a feeling of intrusion as well as a sense of deprivation and insecurity among the different ethnic groups. All these led to the development of a new type of ethnic solidarity and consciousness.

The struggle implicit in conflicting ethnicity was set off by the Evhe. It was manifested in their reaction against the imposed boundary that divided their group. Their agitations in turn fired ethnic loyalty among the Gur-speaking people. The different groups, therefore, organised political parties which they used as the instrument of the struggle. However, the struggle was attenuated during the colonial period because the French controlled the central political authority and at the same time served as an arbiter between the competitors.

With independence, the inequalities between the different groups became more pronounced, particularly when one group assumed the control of the national destiny. But the Gur group which was marginalised politically, socially and economically has had the advantage of dominance in the army. This advantage was used in 1967 to wrest central political power from the Kwa group led by the Evhe. The situation since then is that the Kwa group still dominates the modern sector of the economy while the Gur people monopolise political and military power.

Under this dichotomy, national integration continues to be imperil. Is this problem characteristic of multilingual and multicultural states alone? The answer to this question from what we have observed in Togo is that heterogeneity of language and culture does not inherently lead to political instability, or permanent disunity. It does not also necessarily account for underdevelopment as Pool (1972) postulates. Rather, what magnifies the differences of language and culture among the ethnic groups is the inequitable system of utilising state resources. It is this that creates the urge to further monopolise those resources or the sense of deprivation which leads to the struggle to control state political power. Under such a situation, the sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group is strengthened while that to the new nation-state weakens. Thus the fault lies not in the heterogeneity of language and culture but obviously in the inequitable socio-economic and political policies adopted by the central government. In the case of Togo, such policies were started by the Germans and the French. The successive indigenous Togolese governments have continued to adopt similar policies. This explains why national

integration remains a chimera in Togo as in many other contemporary African nations.

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