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IDENTITY, ETHNIC CONFLICT AND COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

ABSTRACT

Ethnic identity is one of the most significant types of identities. Meanwhile, some researchers have recently begun to criticise the term 'identity' as being too excessively associated with political ideologies, lacking operational power and being difficult to define precisely. Simultaneously, attention has been drawn to what can be referred to as 'ethnic revival.' Ethnic identity is created based on the opposition between what is 'one's own' and what is 'foreign.' Even though the category of 'the Other' or the 'foreign' always appears in the context of identity, it has a special significance in the case of ethnic identity. By such means, the belonging to a particular ethnic group is emphasized, while simultaneously one is cut off from other groups. Conflicts between clans, tribes and ethnic groups have occurred throughout the ages and in all civilisations. There is no single opinion among researchers about how ethnic conflict should be defined. Increasingly, in recent literature of the subject, the distinction between *ethnic conflicts* and *communal conflicts* has come to be applied. The article aims to analyse the identity problems expressed in ethnic and communal conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is based on the critically reviewed literature of the subject, as well as the author's conclusions from many years of research on the problem of state dysfunctionality, conducted in Sub-Saharan African countries.

Keywords: ethnic identity, ethnic group, ethnic conflict, communal conflict, identity problems, Sub-Saharan Africa

*Ethnic conflict is caused by the fear of the future, lived through the past.*¹

Vesna Pesić

Conflicts between clans, tribes and ethnic groups have occurred throughout the ages and in all civilisations. As they are related to fundamental issues of identity, they are usually violent, cruel and bloody. They also usually last longer than other conflicts, while one side's victory frequently leads to the extermination (genocide) of the enemy.² These conflicts are referred to as *ethnic conflicts*. Increasingly, in recent English-language literature, the distinction between *ethnic conflicts* and *communal conflicts* has come to be applied.³

Ethnic identity is one of the most significant types of identities. Meanwhile, some researchers have recently begun to criticise the term *identity* as being excessively associated with political ideologies, lacking operational power and being difficult to define precisely.⁴ Simultaneously, attention has been drawn to what can be referred to as *ethnic revival*.⁵

Ethnic identity is created based on the opposition between what is *one's own* and what is *foreign*. Even though the category of *the Other* or the *foreign* always appears in the context of identity, it has a special significance in the case of ethnic identity. By such means, the belonging to a particular ethnic group is emphasized, while simultaneously one is cut off from other groups. Such an identification also entails an identification with a specific culture.⁶

In his text *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr introduced a distinction between the morality of the individual and that of the group, questioning the statement that society is the sum of its individuals.⁷ For Niebuhr, society is a collective in which egoism grows and becomes magnified. An individual has more of a capacity to take into account the interests of others, for compassion and undertaking selfless acts. In turn, a group is characterized by a lower propensity towards exceeding its own

¹ D.A. Lake, D.S. Rothchild (eds.), *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation*, Princeton 1998, p. 7.

² S.P. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji i nowy kształt ładu światowego*, transl. by H. Jankowska, Warszawa 2008, p. 384.

³ K. Trzcíński, "Co łączy i dzieli communal conflict oraz 'konflikt etniczny'? Analiza znaczeniowa obu terminów i ich nigeryjska egzemplifikacja", *Afryka*, no. 42 (2015), pp. 11-27.

⁴ P. Zawadzki, "Czas i tożsamość. Paradoks odnowienia problemu tożsamości", *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 2003, no. 3, p. 5; M. Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, "Tożsamość etniczna jednostki w kontekście pogranicza", in J. Nikitorowicz, D. Misiejuk, M. Sobecki (eds.), *Etniczność i obywatelskość w Nowej Europie. Konteksty edukacji międzykulturowej*, Białystok 2007, p. 324.

⁵ G. Babiński, "Etniczność", in *Encyklopedia Socjologiczna*, vol. 1 (1998), p. 191; M. Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, "Tożsamość...", p. 325.

⁶ L. Holy, "Kulturowe tworzenie tożsamości etnicznej", in Z. Mach, A. K. Paluch (eds.), "Sytuacja mniejszościowa i tożsamość", *Zeszyty Naukowe UJ MXXIX*, p. 40; M. Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, "Tożsamość...", p. 332.

⁷ R. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society. A Study in Ethics and Politics*, Westminster 2002.

limitations, understanding the needs of others, while also being more focused on itself and ruthless in achieving its own goals. In other words, an individual would not commit such acts as those of which a group is capable when obsessed with the necessity of protecting its real or alleged interests.⁸

In a large majority, Africans themselves do not place the blame for the conflicts across their continent on ethnic issues, but rather primarily on the politicians and their bad governance, as well as on the legacy of colonialism. This is in accordance with the actual state of affairs, as nowhere outside of Africa are ethnic or regional issues used to such an extent in the power struggle nor do politicians so cynically disguise themselves in the garments of the protectors of the interests of a particular ethnic group or region, without taking into account the costs and consequences such politics may have for the citizens of their countries. The slogans of defending the interests of ethnic groups are a fantastic weapon applied by politicians, allowing them to polarize societies, mobilize their own electoral groups to win elections and later to execute their political goals.⁹ This is confirmed by a text message survey organised with the framework of the *U-Report Pan-African poll, conducted in the second half of May 2016*, in which over 86,000 youths from Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, the Central African Republic, Senegal, Liberia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Guinea participated. In answer to one of the questions, *Why is Africa more prone to conflicts than other regions?*, the majority, that is, 56% respondents, indicated this was the fault of *politicians fighting for power*, while 19% stated that it was the result of *inequality* and 17% of *poverty*.¹⁰ The above-mentioned colonial legacy is not without its significance in this context, as due to the colonial division introduced by European states, a population that was diverse in ethnic and linguistic terms was enclosed within the borders of artificial postcolonial formations and were antagonized with premeditation by the colonial authorities in accordance with the principle *divide et impera*.¹¹ This state of affairs was sanctioned by the Organization of African Unity's principle of *uti possidetis* in most Sub-Saharan African countries, which – as a result – has led to the 190 cultural groups being divided and separated by the borders of the postcolonial countries, while the majority of the inhabitants of this region of the world do not communicate within their families by using the official state language. According to the *Ethno-Linguistic Fractionalisation* (ELF) indicator, which makes it possible to express the issue of multiethnicity in numbers, out of the 20 most diversified ethnically countries in the world, 18 are in Sub-Saharan Africa. The most ethnically diverse countries on the continent include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon,

⁸ I. Krzyżanowska-Skowronek, "Ujęcie dobra i zła w realistycznej koncepcji stosunków międzynarodowych", *Etyka i Dobro*, Kraków 2015, pp. 269-270.

⁹ D. Keen, *Complex Emergencies*, Cambridge 2008, p. 23; R. Kłosowicz, *Konteksty dysfunkcyjności państw Afryki Subsaharyjskiej*, Kraków 2017, p. 238.

¹⁰ UNICEF, *U-Report Providing a Voice to Young Africans*, 16 June 2016, at <<https://www.unicef.org/innovation/stories/u-report-providing-voice-young-africans>>, 20 April 2020; "Youth Chastise African Leaders", *New African*, no. 563 (2016), p. 8.

¹¹ A. Żukowski, "Pogranicza w Afryce Subsaharyjskiej. Regiony współpracy czy konfliktów?", *Forum Politologiczne*, vol. 10 (2010), pp. 225-226.

Zambia, Chad and Nigeria.¹² It is easy to imagine the problems these countries struggle with when their citizens do not understand the official language. For comparison, in the European Union, 23 languages have the status of official languages, 15 are considered unofficial languages, while 10 – regional languages. In general, this amounts to 48 languages of which part is practically not in use. In turn, there are over two thousand such languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the most populous state in Africa, Nigeria, about 250 languages are in use. In most African countries, the language of the administration is that of the former colonizers, e.g. French, English or Portuguese, while in countries with a large percentage of Muslims the official language is Arabic, which is used by 150 million people on the African continent. This language usually functions as the administrative language alongside those of the largest ethnic groups.¹³

According to the constructivist approach, which is especially popular among African researchers, ethnicity in Africa only appeared as a result of the adoption of Western cultural patterns and types of identities by colonial authorities. In attempting to exercise control over the plurality and diversity of the tribes, the colonisers began to introduce new kinds of self-identification, produced by the 'white man's' world. The 'primordialists', who oppose the hypothesis set by the constructivists, bring up the fact that the borders of post-colonial African states traverse ethnic territories as their crowning argument; therefore, African ethnic groups existed before the appearance of European colonies in this area.¹⁴

It is worth noting that Western researchers usually use such terms as *ethnic group* and *tribe* to describe African communities. In turn, the terms *nation* and *people* are usually applied among African philosophers. For Western researchers, the basis for the distinction between a tribe and a nation is the bond linking the members of a particular community. In the case of a tribe this is rather the direct kinship bond, while in the case of the nation – loyalty towards the state as an abstract value.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that European colonisers followed a political approach of differentiating the tribes and bringing them into conflict with one another, attempting to maintain power at minimum cost. The political approach of the colonial authorities involved, for example, supporting smaller ethnic groups so that these would control the larger communities on their behalf. Such tactics are characteristic for British colonies, in which London applied the above-mentioned principle of *indirect rule*, transferring many of the administrative powers to the local elites.¹⁶

¹² D.N. Posner, "Measuring Ethnic Fractionalisation in Africa", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2004), p. 857; D. Kosiński, "O wpływie wieloetniczności na rozwój gospodarczy w Afryce Subsaharyjskiej", *Afryka. Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Afrykanistycznego*, no. 27 (2008), pp. 41-42.

¹³ B. Wójciewicz, L. Posthumus, "Droga ku wielojęzyczności RPA", *Afryka*, no. 44 (2016), p. 26.

¹⁴ R. Vorbrich, "Etniczność a trybalizm w Afryce", in J.J. Pawlik, M. Szupejko (eds.), *Afryka na progu XXI wieku. Kultura i społeczeństwo*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 311-319.

¹⁵ K. Trzciński, "Koncepcja 'metanarodu' jako przyczynek do budowy trwałych państw w Afryce", in D. Pietrzyk-Reeves, M. Kułakowska (eds.), *Studia nad wielokulturowością*, Kraków 2010, p. 435; R. Vorbrich, "Wstęp", in Idem (ed.), *Plemię, państwo, demokracja. Uwarunkowania kultury politycznej w krajach pozaeuropejskich*, Poznań 2007, pp. 8-10.

¹⁶ R. Blanton, T.D. Mason, B. Athow, "Colonial Style and Postcolonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa",

The colonizers, by using groups of indigenous communities to administer their huge territories in Africa, frequently fuelled ethnic antagonisms in a very planned and methodical manner, as in the case of the Hutu and Tutsi peoples. In the initial phase of their governing over the Rwanda-Urundi colony, the Belgians based their administration on the Tutsi, in actuality taking over the administrative system introduced earlier by the Germans.¹⁷ They also enforced administrative segregation between the Hutu and the Tutsi by incorporating tribal affiliation into the identification documents.¹⁸ When in the 1950s, the Tutsi as the local elite of the colony began to aspire to independence, the Belgians changed their political approach and began supporting the Hutu. The decades-long politics of differentiating these two ethnic groups was one of the factors that led to the later conflicts in the independent countries of Rwanda and Burundi.¹⁹ It took on the largest scale in Rwanda in 1994, claiming the lives of as many as 800 000 victims, including 70% of the Tutsi population according to estimates.²⁰ The Belgians in Rwanda and Burundi made use of the experience they had gained in Congo, where they fuelled the tensions between tribes when facing the loss of power, an example of which was the conflict between the Lulua and Baluba tribes in the Kasai province or the backstage support they provided to the separatist aspirations of Katanga, rich in mineral resources.

After gaining independence, the lack of autonomous political elites and modern institutions of civil society led to various groups of interests of an ethnic character competing against each other. As a matter of course, rivalry for power began between these groups, which changed into a struggle for access to natural resources. As in some of the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa no developed institutions of civil society exist within which groups of interests could compete with each other in the framework of established political systems, the political rivalry is frequently of an ethnic nature between groups distinguished as communities of language, tradition or region of residence. In such a situation, the power held by one ethnic group strikes at the interests of another, since exercising power becomes a means to strengthen the power and influences of a specific tribal group or region.²¹ This is usually the ethnic group that is dominant in

Journal of Peace Research, vol. 38, no. 4 (2001), pp. 473-491; R. Kłosowicz, "Państwa dysfunkcyjne w Afryce Subsaharyjskiej", in Idem (ed.), *Państwa dysfunkcyjne i międzynarodowe wysiłki zmierzające do ich naprawy*, Kraków 2014, pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ In 1922, the League of Nations sanctioned Belgian rule over the Rwanda-Urundi colony as a mandated territory. In actuality, the Belgian armies had already taken these areas in 1916.

¹⁸ J. Bar, *Rwanda*, Warszawa 2013, p. 73; B. Ziolkowski, *Konflikty zbrojne we współczesnej Afryce. Stan obecny na tle historycznym – zarys*, Toruń 2003, pp. 124-125.

¹⁹ J. Bar, *Rwanda...*, pp. 96-106.

²⁰ Idem, *Po ludobójstwie. Państwo i społeczeństwo w Rwandzie 1994-2012*, Kraków 2013, p. 72; D. Kosiński, "O wpływie wieloetniczności...", pp. 43-44.

²¹ R. Zięba (ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe po zimnej wojnie*, Warszawa 2008, p. 452; R. Kłosowicz, "The Problem of Bad Governance as a Determinant of State Dysfunctionality in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Politeja. The Journal of the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University*, vol. 65, no. 5 (2018), pp. 10-11.

terms of its population numbers. Even if African states hold democratic elections as a result of pressure or external intervention, the majority that comes to power uses it to marginalize the minority. In countries where the ethnic conflict is of a very acute nature, its impact is observable not only in how the highest posts in the state apparatus are staffed – it also refers to the mid- and low-ranking officials. This was the situation in Rwanda before the genocide in 1994.²² In Rwanda, the Tutsi had a dominant position in society and the civil service for decades. This *Tutsification* of the public administration created tensions between the Hutu and the Tutsi, which as a consequence led to the civil war and genocide on an enormous scale, resulting in the deaths of 800,000 citizens of Rwanda.²³

There is no single opinion among researchers about how ethnic conflict should be defined. In recent years, at least three classifications of ethnic conflicts have been developed, proposed by renowned specialists in the field. According to Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff, they can be classified as the wars of *minorities*, including into this category regional groups, religious and linguistic ones, those that follow similar cultural values or have similar historical experiences, minorities that are discriminated against.²⁴ According to Jonathan Fox, such conflicts can be defined as *ethno-religious* groups.²⁵ Mary Kaldor describes them simply as *identity-based* groups. Claims to the right to exercise power are defined based on a special identity that can be linked to one's nationality, clan, religion or language. Kaldor does not stop at these categories and also includes what she refers to as political identity.²⁶ At first glance, it seems that in African conditions this has little significance; however, one should not forget that since gaining independence African countries have gone through different forms of governance, which has not been without some impact on the civil and military elites. Researchers who adhere to the opinion that such a category as *ethnic conflicts* exists draw attention to the fact that the ethnic solidarity of the opposition is strong enough for civil wars to last longer and for the achievement of a compromise to be extremely encumbered.²⁷

In Africa, the most characteristic communal conflicts take place between opponents who identify themselves using cultural, religious, political or economic criteria. These are violent conflicts between non-state groups that are organised along a shared communal identity.²⁸ The term *communal conflict* is sometimes used in critical texts

²² J. Hatzfeld, *Englebert z rwandyjskich wzgórz*, Wołowiec 2015, pp. 38-39.

²³ J.L. Soeters, *Ethnic Conflict and Terrorism. The Origins and Dynamics of Civil Wars*, London 2005, p. 25.

²⁴ T. Gurr, B. Harff, *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics*, Boulder 1994.

²⁵ J. Fox, "The Influence of Religious Legitimacy on Grievance Formation by Ethno-Religious Minorities", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1999), pp. 289-307.

²⁶ M. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge 2008, pp. 6-8.

²⁷ A. Hironaka, *Neverending Wars. The International Community, Weak States, and the Perpetuation of Civil War*, Cambridge-London 2005, pp. 9-10.

²⁸ J. Brosche, E. Elfversson, "Communal conflict, civil war, and the state. Complexities, connections, and the case of Sudan", *American Journal of Case Reports*, no. 1 (2012), at <<https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/communal-conflict-civil-war-and-the-state/>>, 12 July 2020.

interchangeably with the term *ethnic conflict*. This results from the fact, as noted by Arend Lijphart, that the term *communal group* has become almost synonymous with *ethnic group*. Meanwhile, according to Krzysztof Trzciński, ethnic conflict and communal conflict cannot always be applied interchangeably. Communal conflict refers both to the confrontation between members of different ethnic groups or religious communities and clashes between villages, whose parties are defined through narrower identities. The terms denote certain common features, among which one should distinguish the reference to ethnic symbolism and myths in the process of defining the divisions between groups; however, communal conflict also involves political or economic factors, such as issues of land ownership.²⁹ A typical example of a communal conflict is the dispute between the farmers and the herders along the entire Sahel belt, for example the Nigerian Peulh herders and the Tuaregs from Mali.³⁰ In most countries, open military conflicts do not occur; however, this type of low-intensity conflicts have taken place in Nigeria, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Niger, Senegal, Ethiopia,³¹ as well as Tanzania.³² In the majority, these were incidents in which between a few and a few dozen people were killed. These conflicts are not publicized; however, according to estimations, in Nigeria and other West African countries in 2016 more people died in incidents between farmers and livestock breeders than over the previous 6 years at the hands of terrorists from Boko Haram, whose victims are estimated to amount to about 15 000.³³

Samuel Huntington identified three characteristic features of communal conflict: an *identity-driven and polarised character, the high levels of violence involved, and their longevity*.³⁴ Aside from ethnic and communal conflicts, Huntington distinguishes one other category – fault-line conflicts taking place along the borderlines between states.³⁵ They are linked to an ethnic identity in the borderlands context, which takes on a specific meaning. The borderlands are a space, not only physical but also symbolic, in which contact with *the Other* is incessant. As a result, in the borderlands we are dealing with a constant accentuation of ethnic identity. An individual repeatedly enters into interaction with others whom he/she defines through their ethnic sense of belonging. However, the specific nature of the ethnic relations in the particular borderlands should be noted. Various ethnic groups co-exist in the borderlands, among which very

²⁹ K. Trzciński, *Ograniczanie konfliktów w Nigerii i Indonezji. Hybrydowy model power-sharing*, Warszawa 2019, p. 53.

³⁰ J. Brosche, E. Elfversson, "Communal Conflict..."

³¹ D. Seddon, J. Sumberg, "Conflict between Farmers and Herders in Africa. Analysis", *Department for International Development*, at <<http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/R6618a.pdf>>, 16 January 2016.

³² K. Makoye, "Tanzania Struggles to End Clashes Between Farmers and Herders", *Inter Press Service*, 16 January 2014, at <<http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/01/tanzania-finds-hard-stop-farmers-herders-fighting-resources/>>, 16 January 2016.

³³ M. Siollum, "Cattle rustling, the new conflict", *New African*, no. 562 (2016), p. 8.

³⁴ M.R. Berdal, "Disarmament and Demobilisation After Civil Wars. Arms, Soldiers and the Termination of Armed Conflicts", *Adelphi Paper*, no. 303 (1996), pp. 12-13.

³⁵ S.P. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji...*, pp. 440-441.

complex relations may be established. In general, we encounter a culturally-dominant group and another one (or more than one) that is dependent.³⁶ Borderland conflicts have many common features with communal conflicts. Borderland wars occur both between countries and ethnic groups as well as between different ethnic groups themselves (though frequently fuelled by neighbouring countries). In these conflicts, the aim may be to gain control over the territory or over the population.³⁷ A contemporary example of such a conflict is the war between Chad and Sudan (2005–2008), which began with a conflict in the borderlands of these two countries linked to the population (mainly from the tribes Dajjo and Masalit) attempting to escape from the Janjaweed and join their kinsmen living in Chad. In response to the infringement of the territory by Sudanese militia supported by Khartoum, the government of Chad declared war on Sudan.³⁸

In recent years, some of the researchers have drawn attention to the progressing politization of ethnicity, occurring in all regions of the world but primarily applicable to the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. This has led to the formation of a subdiscipline called ethnopolitics, which makes use of the methodology applied in the political sciences and in ethnology. In his book *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework*, Joseph Rothschild included the theoretical bases for the term *ethnopolitics*.³⁹ He distinguished three categories that mutually influence each other: the central elites and governments, the dominant ethnic group, and the less significant subordinate ethnic groups. In turn, Andrzej Wierzbicki claims that the ethnic factor in politics means not only the representation of the interests of a particular nationality, but also reflects the role of traditional structures based on family ties and tribes within the state. He also emphasizes that the subject of interethnic relations covers not only the relations between the state and the ethnic communities, but also the mutual relations between the ethnic communities themselves.⁴⁰ Following Rothschild, Wierzbicki claimed that *the defining of the ethnopolitics in a specific country is conditioned by its ethnic structure and the approach of those in power to the ethnic communities inhabiting it*.⁴¹

In most African countries, the inherited artificial postcolonial borders either enclosed ethnically diverse populations, frequently ones that were in conflict with each other, within the framework of one administrative unit, or divided numerous groups and communities. Regretfully, it is normal in weaker African states for those ruling the country to form the foundation of their power from among their own clan or tribal group if they want to maintain it. Since the possibilities of dividing the available

³⁶ M. Bieńkowska-Prasznik, "Tożsamość etniczna...", p. 332.

³⁷ S.P. Huntington, *Zderzenie cywilizacji...*, pp. 440–441.

³⁸ R. Łoś, "Konflikt w Sudanie i wojna z Czadem", in R. Łoś, J. Regina-Zacharski (eds.), *Współczesne konflikty zbrojne*, Warszawa 2010.

³⁹ J. Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework*, New York 1981.

⁴⁰ Translated from Polish: A. Wierzbicki, *Etnopolityka w Azji Centralnej. Między wspólnotą etniczną a obywatelską*, Warszawa 2008, p. 28.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 42

resources are limited due to the general poverty of the state, a particular ethnic group supports the leader originating from it, as this provides easier access to the said resources. In consequence, the political support, rather than being the effect of *good governance*, results from the fear that after 'our guy' has left his post, the ethnic group from which the power elites are derived will no longer be able to take advantage of the resources if the representative of another ethnic group were to take over ruling the country. Those in power cynically take advantage of these fears and willingly fuel the hatred and animosity between various ethnic groups as this increases their chances of remaining in power. This is precisely what Jean-Bédél Bokassa did in the Central African Empire, as did Samuel Doe in Liberia or the Hutu politicians ruling in Rwanda.⁴² Paul Collier notes that *autocracy in ethnically diverse societies reduces growth and the most likely reason is that diversity tends to narrow the support base of the autocrat.... The more diverse the society, the smaller the autocrat's group is likely to be. This in turn changes the incentives for the autocrat. The narrower the base of social support, the stronger the incentive for economic policy to sacrifice in order to redistribute income to the autocrat's group.*⁴³

The war in Darfur, and the earlier war lasting many years between the armies of the Republic of Sudan and the people of the southern provinces of the country are examples of how the government in Khartoum antagonized one ethnic group against another in order to achieve its political goals, in this case – forcing the people into submission and quelling the threat of the secession of the South. The authorities utilized voluntary armed units of the Muslim militia (referred to as the Janjaweed). The Janjaweed, armed and controlled by the government in Khartoum, accused of massacres of Christians and animists in southern Sudan through ethnic cleansing, were in reality executing the plans of those giving the orders. The Janjaweed with impunity bombarded and burnt villages to the ground, poisoned wells and appropriated the property of their victims, while the cattle of the hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of the rebelling provinces were seized or killed, placing the ethnic groups opposing the central government at risk of dying from starvation. Humanitarian organisations estimate that as a result of the activities of these militia groups as many as 200,000 people may have died, while millions became refugees.⁴⁴

Pre-national ethnic consciousness alongside the colonial legacy and low economic development constitute an explosive cocktail, resulting in wars which lead to the collapse of a state. What is worse, the end of a conflict is only a prelude to the next clashes, since the poorer a country becomes, the more susceptible it is to civil wars; in this way,

⁴² Convicted for war crimes, the Prime Minister of Rwanda Jean Kambanda testified that the plans for the ethnic cleansing of the Tutsi were openly discussed during parliamentary debates, in: L. Melvern, *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwanda Genocide and the International Community*, London 2004; M. Banton, O. Igwara (ed.), *Ethnic Hatred: Genocide in Rwanda*, London 1995, pp. 93-94.

⁴³ P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion. Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, Oxford 2008, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁴ D. Mephram, A. Ramsbotham, *Darfur: The Responsibility to Protect*, London 2006, p. 3; "The Crisis in Darfur", 16 June 2004, *Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress*, pp. 1-3, at <<http://www.fas.org/man/crs/RS21862.pdf>>, 30 October 2012.

a vicious cycle of state failure and internal conflict commences. In addition, in a poor country, it is not necessary to have a large military force at one's disposal. The leader of the rebel forces in Zaire, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, marching across the country at the head of his forces, gave reporters an interview in which he clearly implied that the only things he needed to trigger and execute a rebellion were 10,000 dollars and a satellite phone, because in such a poor country this amount of money can easily be used to form a small army, while the telephone is enough to establish contacts with traders and finalize transactions regarding the raw materials acquired in the conquered areas rich in natural resources.⁴⁵

One such example can be the Central African Republic, in which the ethnic affiliation of the president and his background in a specific part of the country translate into access to offices in the public administration and army. The Central African Republic is inhabited by over 80 ethnic groups.⁴⁶ When General André Kolingba ascended to power as a result of a coup d'état in 1981, he selected people for state and military positions exclusively based on their ethnic background. Kolingba was a member of the Yakoma tribe from the southern part of the country, whose population constitutes no more than 5% of the inhabitants of the Central African Republic. During his presidency, the members of the Yakoma tribe took all the most important positions in the state and in the army. The recruitment to the armed forces was also conducted according to ethnic identification. This later had very serious consequences when Kolingba was replaced by Ange-Félix Patassé, who came from a tribe from the north, as the result of democratic elections held under pressure from the USA and France in 1993. After assuming power, Patassé, who was supported jointly by the Gbaya, Kara and Kaba peoples, not only began to fire civil servants appointed by Kolingba from the state administration, but also initiated similar changes among the army officers. He formed a well-paid presidential guard unit (Unité de sécurité présidentielle – USP) and a military formation to which mainly the members of the tribes from the northern part of the country were recruited. Further dismissals among the soldiers or forcing them to resign from service by not paying them their wages led in 1996–1997 to the eruption of numerous revolts against the new president. As he was not confident of his own soldiers' loyalty, Patassé asked for outside help. It was provided by Muammar Kaddafi, who sent a unit of well-equipped and trained Libyans, who reinforced the presidential guards. In response, Kolingba, who had previously been deposed, attempted a coup d'état with the support of the dissatisfied soldiers, usually derived from the southern parts of the country. After quelling the rebellion, Patassé decided to deal with the Yakoma, which led to the exodus of about 20,000 people, involving crimes and various violations against civilians. The president of the Central African Republic until 2013, François Bozizé, also distrusted the army.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ P. Collier, *The Bottom Billion...*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ "Background Note: Central African Republic", *U.S. Department of State, Bureau of African Affairs*, 18 January 2010, at <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4007.htm>>, 7 January 2012.

⁴⁷ François Bozizé was overthrown in March 2013 as the result of the rebellion of the Séléka coalition. For more on the situation in the Central African Republic, see: R. Kłosowicz, "Central African

His Republican Guard (*Garde Républicaine*) consisted almost exclusively of 'patriots', that is, those who had supported Bozizé's rebellion in 2001, as well as the Chadians who had come with him.⁴⁸

A similar situation took place in Uganda, where, after the British departure, power was divided between the president of the country, a position taken by King Frederick Mutesa II of Buganda from the southern peoples Baganda and Prime Minister Milton Apollo Obote, representing the peoples of the north (Lango). Very quickly a conflict developed between the north and the south, fuelled by the ambitions of both politicians. Obote removed Mutesa II from power, and then he himself was ousted by his chief of staff, Idi Amin. After Amin (Kakwa peoples) was deposed, Obote returned to power, only to be overthrown by his generals, Tito and Basilio. During this period, the main support for those in power was provided primarily by soldiers recruited among the peoples coming from the northern part of the country – the Acholi, the Kakwa and the Lango. However, Obote trusted mainly his own ethnic group, the Lango, inasmuch as did Amin, during whose time in power the officer corps was recruited primarily from among his own Kakwa ethnic group. In turn, of course, Tito Okello had a preference for his own people – the Acholi. During the reigns of the listed military dictators, armies consisting of members of the northern ethnic groups took part in the pacification of the people of the south, mainly the Baganda, Toro, Ankole and Bunyoro. When the representative of the south, Yoweri Musaweni, came to power, the tables were turned and mainly the Acholi people were pacified.⁴⁹

In Burundi, during the 1993 October coup d'état, the military forces attacked the radio and television headquarters, as well as the presidential palace in Bujumbura. Next, the military imprisoned and murdered the president of the country, Melchior Ndadaye, and several of the ministers in his government. The coup was led by the president of Burundi Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, who like many officers participating in the coup came from the Tutsi tribe.⁵⁰

In Liberia, the deep ethnic divisions were only shaped during Samuel Doe's presidency. Before that time, Liberia was ruled by an elite group derived from among the descendants of American freed slaves who had arrived in the country in the 1820s. Despite the evident impairment of the local Liberian population in terms of access to power, there was no strife of an ethnic character as the American Liberians attempted to introduce policies effacing tribal differences between the inhabitants of the country they ruled. However, a clear distinction existed between the Honourables, consisting of the American Liberians, and the local population. The latter tolerated the situation as long as the economic conditions in the country were tolerable. When an economic crisis hit

Republic: Portrait of a Collapsed State after the Last Rebellion", *Politeja. The Journal of the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2016), pp. 33-51.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁴⁹ P.D. Williams, *War and Conflict in Africa*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 141-142; D. Keen, *Complex Emergencies...*; W. Jagielski, *Nocni wędrowcy*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 80-82.

⁵⁰ R. Kłosowicz, *Konteksty dysfunkcyjności...*, p. 245.

Liberia towards the end of the 1970s, slogans appeared calling for an end to 'foreign' rule and for equal rights to be granted to all the citizens of the country. The overthrowing of the regime of the descendants of American settlers occurred in April 1980 as a result of a military coup organized by Sergeant Samuel Doe. The dictator, who came to power following the call for the local population to be granted equal rights, decided to found his rule primarily on the members of his own ethnic group, the Krahn, which at that time constituted no more than 4% of the population of Liberia, as well as on the rich Mandingo people involved in trade. Doe was primarily afraid of the Gio and the Mano, in whom he saw a threat to his power. He gradually removed members of these ethnic groups from government offices and the army, replacing them with members of his own ethnic group. The favouring of a small ethnic group aroused sharp opposition among the majority consisting of the Gio and the Mano, especially since the agricultural Krahn people contributed little to the state budget, while the Gio and the Mano brought in most of the income. The Gio and Mano officers and soldiers dismissed from military service formed a guerrilla force under the command of General Thomas Quiwonkpy of the Gio. The rebels attempted to overthrow the regime in Monrovia in November 1985. The coup failed and turned out to be tragic in consequences. Samuel Doe almost immediately responded by conducting an ethnic cleansing campaign in the Nimba region, where over the course of a few days two thousand people from the Gio and Mano groups were killed. Soon the repressions spread to other provinces, while in Grand Gedeh, his home county, the Krahn people aided the government army actively in dealing with the other tribes. When Samuel Doe was overthrown, his successor, Charles Taylor from the Mano, employed the ethnic factor from the very beginning while forming the National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Basing on the Gio and the Mano, who suffered the most during Doe's period in power, Taylor unleashed a violent civil war and exacerbated the ethnic divisions. Taking advantage of the fact that during the 1980s the Mandingo had become specialized in providing loans to peasants with their land as collateral, Taylor's propaganda machine spread the opinion that these practices were dishonest, while those who supported him and would stand against the Krahn and Mandingo were promised they would be released from the incurred liabilities. By such means, Taylor gained broad social support. By skilfully taking advantage of stereotypes and populist slogans, he triggered widespread hatred, imparting onto his struggle for power and resources the traits of ethnic conflict that soon spread into neighbouring countries.⁵¹

Many researchers lean towards the view that the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries were not ready for independence. The abrupt and unexpected change in power when European colonial officials were replaced by local Africans, unprepared for governing, constituted a serious problem. Of course, the degree of preparedness and educational levels among the elites in particular colonies were very diverse. In the initial period of independence, former British colonies were much better managed due to the indirect form of governance that had been in place during colonial times, which

⁵¹ K. Trzcíński, *Wojny w Liberii i Sierra Leone (1989-2002)*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 39-54.

required the educating of the lower-ranking civil servant class.⁵² When the local population came to power in the African countries gaining independence, they took over the existing colonial structures, with the new civil servants not interested in reforms that would limit their power, as they considered the assets inherited from the white colonizers as a certain form of due liabilities. What is more, the offices and profits from them indirectly became the property of their families and tribes. This was a form of clan and tribal enfranchisement through the performing of civil service functions and an expropriation of the state. As Ryszard Kapuściński noted, this was the first sin which immediately resulted in the struggle for power in independent Africa becoming very fierce.⁵³

In consequence, the leaders of African states frequently do not identify with all of the citizens but only with the members of their own clans and tribes. These groups in turn would uncompromisingly support 'their own' leaders, without taking into consideration whether they were progressive politicians or bloodthirsty dictators. They fear that if the leader of another ethnic group comes to power, they will be moved back in the line for profits from the distribution of scarce goods, while the members of their communities will lose their positions in the administration and in the army, which, taking into account the African system of sharing profits with one's family and supporting one's relatives, would lead to them losing their privileged position in the country. As Ryszard Vorbrich has noted, *the practice that stems from tribalism is a particular form of ethnic colonialism, that is, the construction of a power structure based mainly on the members of the leader's ethnic group*.⁵⁴ This involves securing state power in the hands of the elites originating from one region of the country at the expense of other ethnic groups by seizing key government offices (usually the ministry of foreign affairs, internal affairs and the army), treating the areas inhabited by other ethnic groups as conquered territories.⁵⁵

It is interesting in this context to look at the case of Ethiopia, in which the ethnic-based federalism in force since 1994 granted the main ethnic groups their own political and territorial administrative units, the rights to their own official language and political organisations, and even the right to secession. Decidedly, the most controversial to date, taking into account Ethiopian internal politics, is the phrasing of pt. 1 art. 39 of the Constitution, according to which *Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession*.⁵⁶

⁵² Against this background, Belgian colonies have fared the worst, as can be observed in the above-quoted examples of conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly: Zaire) or Rwanda, as have the Portuguese colonies, which gained independence among the last countries on the continent. For more, see: J. Mormul, "Portuguese Colonial Legacy in Luso-African States: a Factor Leading to State dysfunctionality or Favorable to Development?", *Politeja. The Journal of the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the Jagiellonian University*, vol. 56, no. 5 (2018), pp. 41-65.

⁵³ R. Kapuściński, *Heban*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁴ Translated from Polish: R. Vorbrich, *Plemienna i postplemienna Afryka. Koncepcje i postaci wspólnoty w dawnej i współczesnej Afryce*, Poznań 2012, pp. 357-358.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, at <<https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/et/et007en.pdf>>, 9 November 2020. In the Internet, there is also a text of the Ethiopian constitution (a PDF file), in which the controversial art. 39 enabling secession is missing.

The idea behind Ethiopian ethnic federalism was the doubtless ceding of more power into the hands of ethnic communities so that they could manage their own affairs. Nonetheless, this basic assumption seems to contradict the actual political practices of the Ethiopian federal government, which perceives the overly high competences of the individual states as a threat that might lead to the disintegration of the country.⁵⁷

There is an on-going debate and various arguments are raised both by those that support this political system as a 'good experiment' and those warning against the 're-tribalization' of Ethiopia.⁵⁸ However, in light of the events of recent years, there is increasing fear that the worst case scenario might occur. As of the beginning of 2018, ethnic and territorial conflicts intensified, as a result of which over 2.4 million people had to leave their homes. The head of the security services of the Amhara state, General Asaminew Tsige moved to take advantage of the tensions in order to overthrow the moderate regional Amhara authorities and to fuel the country-wide hostility towards Tigrayans. In the attacks he organized, the casualties included the governor of Amhara and supporter of the Prime Minister, while in the capital Addis Ababa – the head of the general staff. The series of political assassinations in Ethiopia brought to light the tensions in a country constructed around a model of ethnic federalism, while nationalist sentiments have currently become the main challenge for the unity of the state.⁵⁹

A specific type of division among the communities inhabiting a country can be observed in the Republic of South Africa, where – aside from the rivalry between ethnic groups – the still existing racial divisions between the Black African population of the country and the descendants of white settlers are still clearly observable. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela wrote that one of the most difficult tasks for the African National Congress was overcoming racial and tribal divisions.⁶⁰ After the fall of Apartheid, it seemed that as a result of the reconciliation process constructed on the one hand by Nelson Mandela and, on the other, by some representatives of the white political elites, the decades-long divisions and hostility in the country would be bridged. At that time, the concept of the *Rainbow nation* was created, according to which the South African nation would not be based on racial, ethnic and religious criteria, and the multicultural and multi-ethnic society, antagonized for many decades, would merge together.⁶¹ Meanwhile, in the richest and most developed

⁵⁷ A.I. Samatar, "Ethiopian Federalism: Autonomy Versus Control in the Somali Region", *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 25, no. 6 (2004), p. 1132; R. Kłosowicz, J. Mormul, *Erytrea i jej wpływ na sytuację polityczną w Rogu Afryki*, Kraków 2018, p. 180.

⁵⁸ J. Zahorik, "Ethiopian Federalism Revisited", in P. Chabal, P. Skalník (eds.), *Africanists on Africa. Current Issues*, Berlin 2010, p. 130.

⁵⁹ J. Czerep, "Etiopia – napięcia etniczne zagrożeniem dla państwa", *Biuletyn PISM*, vol. 1866, no. 118 (2019), at <https://www.pism.pl/publikacje/Etiopia__napięcia_etniczne_zagrożeniem_dla_państwa>, 20 March 2020.

⁶⁰ N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Boston–New York–London 1994, p. 86; A. Loomba, *Kolonializm/ postkolonializm*, Poznań 2011, p. 137.

⁶¹ A. Żukowski, "Kształtowanie się systemu politycznego Nowej Południowej Afryki. Wybrane problemy", in "Z problemów społeczno-politycznych współczesnej Afryki Subsaharyjskiej", *Forum Politologiczne*, vol. 1 (2004), p. 119.

country of Sub-Saharan Africa, the road to real reconciliation remains very long. Due to the extremely high crime rate, the white city residents live in well-guarded neighbourhoods, fencing themselves off the black communities, worried about their property and lives. In the countryside, the situation is similar, with numerous attacks on farms belonging to white farmers and homicides, frequently very violent, becoming an everyday reality. In many regions, due to the regular occurrence of such assaults, farmers are incapable of running their farms. As the victims are white farmers, while the attackers are from the black population, social polarisation is progressing, with increasingly larger concentrations of white citizens in particular regions of the country. During my stay in Pretoria in August 2013, I talked to some Polish immigrants who had come to South Africa in the 1980s about the political situation in the country and the problems linked to the deterioration in the quality of how state institutions were operating and the internal tensions between the white and black citizens of the country. One case involved the foundation of the town of Orania intended for white residents only. It currently has a population of about one thousand people who identify as Afrikaner.⁶² The foundation of the town is the continuation of an idea that emerged at the beginning of the 1990s, that is, towards the end of Apartheid, when the Afrikaner far right demanded the creation of a separate state for the whites, primarily Afrikaners, within the territory of the former Boer republics.⁶³

Many of the politicians of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) have fanned the flames, contributing to the polarisation of the society. In March 2010, the leader of the ANC's youth organisation at that time, Julius Malema, sang one of the ANC songs popular among the South African black community fighting against Apartheid, which included the words *kill a Boer*, meaning also *kill a farmer*. Even though the court found the fragment of the song to constitute incitement to hatred, the ANC proceeded with an appeal against the court's decision.⁶⁴ The situation in the country has led to the growing emigration of the white population from South Africa. According to the statistics white population has decreased to 7,9% (4,6 mln) of the total population of South Africa in 2019 as compared to the 16.4 % in 1989.⁶⁵

Currently, ethnic divisions are a very serious challenge for the governments of African countries as well. Ethnic issues are still cynically utilized by some political parties so that they can achieve their temporary political goals, in other cases attempts at eradicating ethnic divisions are introduced in an inconsistent or inept manner. Among

⁶² N. Tweedie, "Orania: the land where apartheid lives on", *The Telegraph*, 13 December 2013, at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/nelson-mandela/10516129/Orania-the-land-where-apartheid-lives-on.html>>, 20 December 2013.

⁶³ A. Żukowski, "Kształtowanie...", p. 105.

⁶⁴ J. Pretorius, "'Dubula ibhunu' (shoot the boer): A psycho-political analysis of farm attacks in South Africa", *Psychology in Society*, no. 47 (2014), pp. 21-40, at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317450115_Dubula_ibhunu_shoot_the_boer_A_psycho-political_analysis_of_farm_attacks_in_South_Africa>, 30 September 2020.

⁶⁵ Statistics South Africa, *Statistical Release. Mid-year population estimates 2019*, 31 July 2020, at <<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0302/P03022019.pdf>>, 29 October 2020.

African studies and political science researchers, there is an ongoing animated debate about the ethnic politics of the Rwandan government introduced after the 1994 genocide. On the one hand, it is forbidden to distinguish between the Hutu and the Tutsi, one should only speak of the Rwandans, while – on the other – the annual celebrations dedicated to the memory of the genocide organised by the state keep the memory of the trauma experienced by Rwandan society during the civil war alive. Some insight into the mentioned celebrations is provided by the reporter Anjan Sundaram from India, who wrote that he had expected something completely different from the celebrations, something that would promote social empathy. Instead, he felt the celebrations were a form of violence, because rather than healing collective wounds, they only exacerbated and emphasized the trauma, a side-effect for which the new Rwandan government could be held responsible. For Sundaram, the terror that the genocide had caused was only re-visited and magnified by these celebrations. What had happened two decades earlier, the experience of war and extermination, would thus continue to be relived, working its way deep into the society and being passed on to younger generations.⁶⁶ The transformation of the tragic anniversary into a national holiday performs two basic functions. Officially, it is supposed to provide a disclosure of historical truth, reconciliation between the victims and their tormentors, the re-establishment of trust and the erasure of ethnic labels. In actuality, it is a strategy for the legitimisation of those in power, signifying the dominance of the Tutsi and the marginalisation of the Hutu within the framework of the homogeneous Rwandan nation.⁶⁷ In his last interview for the African opinion-forming “New African” magazine, the president of Rwanda Paul Kagame provided a very significant response to the reporter’s question about the political opposition in the country: *The Rwandan opposition politics might be different, or similar, to other opposition politics on the African continent but it has its own uniqueness. Again, Rwanda being Rwanda, it is not like another country.* [He explains that Rwanda’s politics had been shaped by a long history of ethnic identification and that this had led to one faction taking matters to the extreme – which led directly to the genocide]... *Our politics therefore changed because of the extreme nature of the events that happened here, to evolve and become that consensus. Consensus building is important.* [He adds that Rwanda had no choice but to look for a different sort of political matrix:] *If the country had continued with the sort of ethnic politics and power play that had existed before and which had led to the loss of nearly one million lives, the only sure outcome would have been to lose maybe another million at some point in the future.*⁶⁸

It seems that the key to solving communal and ethnic conflicts or those resulting from different grounds is in the raising of social awareness (education) and quality of life (the economy, health services), as well as closely linked significant improvement in

⁶⁶ A. Sundaram, *Złe wieści. Ostatni niezależni dziennikarze w Rwandzie*, Wołowiec 2016, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁷ B. Popławski, T. Sawczuk, “Itsembabwoko oznacza genocyd. Sprawiedliwość transformacyjna i pamięć o ludobójstwie w Rwandzie”, *Studia Socjologiczno-Polityczne*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2015), p. 53.

⁶⁸ A. Versi, “Cultivating the winning habit. An Audience with Paul Kagame”, *New African*, February/March 2020, p. 20.

state efficiency through the introduction of good governance by politicians who would attempt to solve the most burning problems of the people in the country they rule over instead of covering for their inept and frequently corrupt governments by manipulating the societies in order to remain in power at all costs. Ben Shepherd links the term *political stability* with the way in which power is wielded and its efficiency for citizens, proposing that it should be primarily associated with good governance.⁶⁹ In this context, the words of the Nigerian philosopher Ifeanyi A. Menkiti are significant as he perceives the future of the successful coexistence of various peoples primarily resulting from the formation of a state of justice. In his opinion, the proper organisation of the lives of the societies within the country is of utmost significance, because if citizens' lives are organised inside a fair-acting country, it will be possible for various peoples to coexist within the same country with its postcolonial borders, and for peaceful resolutions concerning their division to be introduced.⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

⁷⁰ K. Trzeciński, *Demokratyzacja w Afryce Subsaharyjskiej. Perspektywa zachodnioafrykańskiej myśli politycznej*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 75-76.

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