

The Konkomba Yam Market: A Study of a Migrant Community in an Urban Setting

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Abstract

Established in 1982, the Konkomba Yam Market has become a migrant community for Konkombas and other immigrants of northern extraction in Accra, a vibrant commercial centre and a hub of Konkomba enlightenment. Nonetheless, the Market has become prone to frequent fire outbreaks while its peripheries have become scenes of criminal activities in Accra. This paper outlines the processes leading to the establishment of the Konkomba Yam Market and examines its impact on the socio-economic life of the Konkomba.

Keywords: Konkomba, Yam, Market, Urban, Accra

1.0 Introduction

The primordial beginnings of the Konkomba Yam Market are traceable to the activities of Osmanu Tamalbe of Nakpayile in the Northern region. In 1981 Tamalbe contacted the authorities of Ayalolo Primary School for a parcel of land on its compound where he established the Konkomba Yam Market. In 1982 Tamalbe lobbied the Accra City Council and the KorleWe/Gbese of James Town in Accra, for land to relocate the yam market. From a very insignificant number of ten Konkomba traders at the old site at Ayalolo Primary School in 1981, the number of Konkomba traders gradually increased overtime.

Konkomba identity in the early years of colonial rule in Northern Ghana was largely described by colonial authorities as primitive. They were seen as wild people “living away in the bush, clad only in skins.”¹

Described by many as a feuding people, they were regarded, though arguable, as uncivilized and non-progressive. There is no doubt that until the Nanumba-Konkomba conflict of 1981, Konkomba culture and identity were obscure. As Talton (2010) observed: “for the Konkomba, and Konkomba leaders in particular, the 1981 conflict pushed their struggle for social and political equality from a local to a national issue. Konkomba became better known for the conflict for their dominance in the yam trade.”

From such obscurity of Konkomba identity and culture, the Konkomba rose to the height of their civilization owing largely to western education. With an experience in Missionary activities and western education, Konkomba educated elite emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, which formed the Konkomba Improvement Association, which sought to promote Konkomba identity.⁴ This effort was taken over by the Konkomba Youth Association (KOYA) when it was formed in 1977.

While acknowledging the contribution of western education to the promotion of Konkomba identity, it is also imperative to highlight the significance of the Konkomba Yam Market in the Konkomba struggle for social change. Aside being a vibrant commercial centre in Accra, the yam market offered accommodation for dozens of hundreds of commuters from other regions, who come to Accra to look for ‘decent jobs’ to do.

¹ PRAAD ADM 56/1/3375 Land Tenure: “Answers to Questionnaire to Chief Commissioner Northern Territories” p.29

².Ibid., pp. 123-127

The Konkomba Yam Market served as the major avenue for shelter for the Kaya-Yei, handcart pushers, traders and school leavers who traveled to Accra, particularly from the three northern regions. In fact, one can find a member of almost all the ethnic groups in the Northern Region either residing or trading in the Konkomba Yam Market or its periphery. Some of the main ethnic groups in the Northern Region whose indigenes can be found in the Konkomba Yam Market are Dagomba, Nanumba, Gonja, Nawuri, Nchumuru, Chokosi, Vagla, Mamprusi, Basari, Sissala, Wala, Tamplusi, Bimoba, Kanjarga, Frafra, Grushi, Kotokoli and the Dagaaba.

The Konkomba community in the Market is a model upon which the changes/reforms in Konkomba culture and traditions revolve. The impact of the Market on Konkomba culture, traditions and image are multifaceted: there are both positive and negative effects though there is a preponderance of the former.

The Establishment of the Konkomba Yam Market

The genesis of the Konkomba Yam Market is traceable to the efforts of Osumanu Tamalbe of Nakpayile in the Northern region.⁵ Very little is known about the private life of Osumanu Tamalbe. Known only as a full time trader, Tamalbe bought various varieties of foodstuff including tubers of yam from his Konkomba kinsmen in the Northern and Volta Regions of Ghana and carted them to Tema for sale. His business acumen and credit worthiness made him famous not only among the Konkomba, but also among most settlers in the communities he visited. Tamalbe soon rose to prominence following the gains he made from his trade.⁶ His experience in the yam business not only exposed him to the dangers associated with it, but also exposed him to the realization that the yam buyers from the southern part of the country (acting as middlemen) often cheated his illiterate Konkomba farmers. The middlemen often bought each set of hundred tubers of yam far below their market value and sold them at the Timber Yam Market⁷ in Accra at a higher price thus making huge profits. Tamalbe established the Yam Market in Accra to enable his kinsmen cart their goods directly from the north to Accra to sell instead of dealing with the middlemen, a move which guaranteed a ready market and maximum profit for the Konkomba yam farmers.

In 1981, with the support of Hon. Yaneh, a former Member of Parliament for the Saboba Constituency, who was then a teacher at the Ayalolo Primary School at Old Fadama, Tamalbe acquired a parcel of land on the school's compound to establish the Konkomba Yam Market. Within a year, commercial activities in the Konkomba Yam had commenced with not more than ten sheds in the Market.

Though the establishment of the Konkomba Yam Market was influenced by the career of Tamalbe, other factors such as the Nanumba-Konkomba conflict of 1981 that necessitated the relocation of the Market to its present site in 1982 also played a role. As the relations of the two ethnic groups were severed by the conflict, a peaceful co-existence between them, both in the Northern Region and in the 'diaspora', was virtually impracticable. Besides, as the local feud between the two ethnic groups gained national attention, it drew the sympathy of the Dagomba for the Nanumba, resulting in a severance of their relations with the Konkomba.⁸ Located on the compound of the Ayalolo Primary School, the old Konkomba Yam Market was in close proximity with the Timber Yam Market where Nanumba and Dagomba traders conducted business. The resultant effect was that the Nanumba and the Dagomba on the one hand, and the Konkomba on the other, were frequently involved in physical confrontations, thus creating a nearchaotic scene in the two yam markets, which ultimately stifled business activities. It was to pre-empt a spill-over of the Nanumba-Konkomba inter-ethnic conflict to Accra that, the Accra City Council embraced the idea to relocate the Konkomba Yam Market to its present site in 1982.

A separation of the feuding ethnic groups prevented direct contact between them in their daily activities, and thus averted a possible clash of the Nanumba and Dagomba on the one hand and the Konkomba on the other.

³Tamalbe Osumanu was the founder of the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra. He was the first Konkomba to engaged in yam trade. He bought tubers of yam from his Konkomba kinsmen in the Northern Region and sold them in Tema and later in Accra.

⁴ Tamalbe Osumanu [personal communication]. July 9, 2004. He was once the Chairman of the Konkomba Yam Market.

⁵ The Timber Yam Market existed years before the establishment of the Konkomba Yam Market as both a market for timber and tubers of yam.

⁶ Osumanu Tamalbe [personal communication]. July 10, 2004

The Acquisition of Land and Permit

It has already been stated above that Hon. Yaneh assisted Tabalbe to acquire a parcel of land on the compound of the Ayalolo Primary School to start the Konkomba Yam Market in 1981. Yaneh used his position as a staff of the Ayalolo Primary School to influence the authorities of the institution to grant that parcel of land for the Konkomba Yam Market. Subsequently, Tamalbe and Hon. Yaneh acquired a permit from the Accra City Council which legitimized the acquisition of the land. With the support of Baby Okine, then an employee of the Accra City Council, Tamalbe Osumanu, Alex Nkwanta and Issah Kpemor, all ethnic Konkomba, obtained a piece of land from the Gbese Mantse and the Korle We (Gate or clan) to relocate the Konkomba Yam Market. Having followed due customary procedures and acquired the piece of land for a ninety-nine-year lease period, the Konkomba relocated their market to its present site in 1982.⁹

Increased Konkomba Population in Accra

It was the general view of informants that until the late 1980s, there was an insignificant number of Konkomba in Accra. Initially, the estimated number of Konkomba in Accra ranged between one hundred and three hundred Konkomba immigrants, most of whom were students and civil servants. Within two decades, the number of Konkomba immigrants in Accra swelled to the thousands.¹⁰ The rapid increase in the population of the Konkomba in Accra within two decades is a result of the Konkomba Yam Market.

One other factor responsible for the growth of the Konkomba population in Accra was the initial strategy adopted to expand and manage the Market. The three founders of the market divided the one quarter-square kilometer of land into four equal parts. Each of them took a quarter and the remaining quarter was given to Edwin Balasin Njonam. To create a buoyant market, the stakeholders encouraged their kinsmen and Konkomba friends to migrate to the Konkomba Yam Market to erect sheds. Three main reasons were responsible for this decision.

- a) It was envisaged that the migration of the Konkomba into the Market would invariably not only attract more customers and supply of tubers of yam into the Market, but would also increase the profit margins of each stakeholder.
- b) The immigration of the Konkomba into the Market would ensure an effective occupation and utilization of the land. The Konkomba were apprehensive of the fact that if the Market was not effectively utilized, the land could be taken away from them and given to prospective developers. The apprehension of the Konkomba was probably fueled by an ultimatum from the land owners to effectively utilize the land or risk losing it.
- c) Finally, it was hoped that the immigration of the Konkomba into the Market would increase the material prospects and general welfare of Konkomba.

Thus, the custodians of the portions of land in the Konkomba Yam Market embarked on an aggressive campaign to encourage the immigration of their kinsmen and friends from the hinterland to the market. From an insignificant number of sheds in 1982, the number increased to eighty-nine in the late 1980s. Within a decade, the number rose to over two hundred sheds in the market.¹¹ This phenomenal increase in the number of sheds further attracted large populations of the Konkomba immigrants into the market. By 2005, the number of ethnic Konkomba, excluding other ethnic groups, residing and trading in the market was estimated at a little over one thousand.¹²

Another important factor responsible for the immigration of the Konkomba to the Yam Market is the community's perception of urban life in general and Accra in particular. The Konkomba regarded Accra as the "the nineteenth century Africa in Ghana" and desired to take part in the "scramble for space and occupation of Accra." It was this view that partly pushed the Konkomba into the "scramble" for a parcel of land in Accra.

⁷ Reverend John K. Bawa of the Evangelical Church of Ghana [personal communication]. July 10, 2004, at the Konkomba Yam Market. Some of the prominent ethnic Konkomba immigrants in Accra then were Issah Kpemor, Alex Nkwanta, Tincacher Danar, Njonam Baladin Edwin, Tamalbe Osumanu, Dokor Iddrisu, Mr. Yan including Reverend John K. Bawa.

⁸ Osumanu Tamalbe [personal communication]. July 10, 2004.

⁹ This figure excludes the Konkomba employed in the private and public sectors but do not reside or trade in the market. It also excludes Konkomba commuters from the north, who visit the market for a short business.

Estimates from the GPRTU branch in the market indicate that close to one hundred Konkomba alone travel from the market to their residences in the Northern, Volta, Brong Ahafo Regions and the Republic of Togo on almost a daily basis in the lean season of the agricultural year. In the peak season, however, the number increases to approximately two hundred.

In the opinion of Issah Kpemor, the Konkomba regarded the Yam Market as their homeland in Accra.¹³ It was this Konkomba mentality that attracted waves of Konkomba immigrants mainly school leavers and traders into Accra from the 1990s.

The third and probably the most important factor for Konkomba immigration into Accra was the 1994 inter-ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region which served as the push factor and triggered off waves of Konkomba immigrants into Accra. During the conflicts, Konkomba students in Salaga, Wulensi, Bimbilla, Yendi, Tamale and other Secondary Schools in the Northern Region fled the Schools for safety. Many of them were candidates who could not take their examinations as a result of the conflict and in the absence of any alternative arrangements made for them by the West African Examination Council (WAEC), these students were brought to the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra to continue their education. The impressive results that most of these students obtained while in Accra increased the influx of more Konkomba Students into Accra to pursue their education.

Prior to the conflict, there were also hundreds of Konkomba incommmercially buoyant towns in the Northern Region such as Tamale, Yendi, Salaga, Bimbilla and Damongo. These Konkomba, especially the women were engaged in the lucrative *pito* (local beer) industry. Most of these women had acquired a lot of wealth from their businesses, acquired expensive paraphernalia and had integrated into the more “civilized city life”. This otherwise prosperous group of Konkomba business women also fled these towns during the ethnic conflicts and settled at the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra where they continued their business, thus further increasing the number of the Konkomba population in their new found homeland in Accra.

Tradition and Modernity in the Konkomba Yam Market

The world view of the Konkomba regarded females as an adjunct to males. In rural Konkomba settlements, their women were among the most marginalized in Ghana. From childhood to adulthood, Konkomba girls had little or no opportunity at all to assert themselves. For instance, “a konkomba girl is betrothed at birth to a man of more than twenty years of age”¹⁴ and did not have the legitimate right to negotiate for the marriage as this was the prerogative of her parents.¹⁵ Similarly, though infrequently, girls – usually sisters or daughters – were exchanged by two men for marriage, denying the girls their legitimate right to choose their own partners or negotiate their marriages.¹⁶ There were also instances when Konkomba men ‘bought’ Kabre and Gurma women for marriage¹⁷ while others were simply reduced to inheritable objects.¹⁸

At adulthood, a married Konkomba woman had no space to negotiate or choose her preferred sexual or reproductive life. In fact, the wife had no right to turn down the request or advances of her husband for sexual intercourse. Neither did she have the right to embrace any birth control measures such as the use of contraceptives without the consent of her husband. The abuse of the rights of Konkomba wives was an inherent phenomenon of the Konkomba modes of marriage. Besides, culturally, Konkomba husbands were “jealous of their prospective wives’ lovers and sought to pursue and kill them.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, there was some space of sexual freedom exercised by Konkomba women. For example, “girls were allowed full sexual freedom as far as parental control was concerned.”²⁰

Konkomba culture did not permit a married Konkomba woman to decide on the number of children to procreate.

¹⁰ Issah Kpemor [personal communication], July 10, 2004

¹¹ David Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana* (Oxford University Press, 1961, London), p. 108

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 95

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.97-98. According to Tait, previously the payment was made in cowries. Presently, however, the payment is “four cows, worth £40 and £50 at Saboba market prices.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98. When a Konkomba man dies, his wives are inherited by his brothers or sons. Tait vividly explained this point when he said, “only two modes of inheritance of widows seem to be prescribed. A man may not inherit his own mother; nor does a man inherit his son’s wife. But sons inherit widows from their fathers, elder brothers inherit from younger brothers, and inheritance ranges as wide as an agnatic third cousin or his son.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.96

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

In fact there were certain phrases in the Konkomba language, which reinforced the practice whereby a Konkomba woman is accorded little or no respect and authority in the family. Such phrases include: ‘*ununpusauninpuya; ununpuechikawiri; ununpukakpaekoo and unupu mu sa ba*’²¹

Whereas these traditions are still held onto by the Konkomba in the hinterland, their counterparts in the Konkomba Yam Market who have been exposed to city life and modernity have discarded them completely. The use of derogatory phrases as those indicated above and the abuse of women have become a thing of the past among the Konkomba in the Yam Market. They have come to uphold the dignity of their women and thus evolved a new culture as a result of the influence of different cultures in the city. Indeed, the Konkomba community in the Yam Market has become a model for all Konkomba communities in the hinterland to discard the obsolete culture and embrace change.

The modes of choosing marriage partners in rural Konkomba settlements no longer applied to the marriage practices of the Konkomba in the Yam Market. But according to Jonathan Ntigma, though these traditions have become obsolete in the eyes of the Konkomba Community in the Yam Market, they are not all together illegal.²² Ultimately, the rejection of child betrothal, exchange and widow inheritance as modes of choosing marriage partners has melted away the abuses of the rights of wives, which were inherent in them. Besides, the rejection of these Konkomba traditions has afforded prospective couples the opportunity to marry partners of their choice. The resultant effect, as Ntigma opines, was that most of the Konkomba homes in the Yam Market were “successful and characterized by understanding and peace and thus served as a model for those in the hinterland to emulate, and this has changed the matrimonial attitude of the rural Konkomba man.”²³

It is also significant to observe that the Konkomba Community in the Yam Market has embraced the need to empower their wives economically, a practice which hitherto, was alien to their customs in general. Konkomba men ordinarily did not support their wives financially or economically. This practice, some informants maintain, would make their wives assertive. Their apprehension was that a wealthy wife might tend to be arrogant and disrespectful to the husband. However, due to the economic orientation of the Konkomba community in the Yam Market, their wives are supported financially, and in most cases, they became the best traders in the Market. This embrace of modernity by the Konkomba in the Yam Market was gradually emulated by their kinsmen in the hinterland as a few of them had begun to empower their wives economically. Though this ‘cultural revolution’ has caught up with the Konkomba, its progress has been rather very slow.

The Konkomba Yam Market has transformed the outlook of the Konkomba in general. Before their exposure to urban life in the Yam market, the rural Konkomba were generally said to be ill-tempered and belligerent as they had the passion for fighting for its sake. For instance, the view that “the kin of a man who has been killed in a fight will kill any man of the clan of the killer”²⁴ aptly captures the spirit of vengeance among the Konkomba.

In Konkomba culture, the brother of a slain kinsman was duty-bound to avenge his brother’s death by killing the perpetrator or one of his relatives. Reprisal attacks linked to the first killing sometimes led to a full blown inter-clan war.²⁵ But this posture was blamed on the predicament they suffered under the suzerainty of Dagomba, the Nanumba and the Gonja.

¹⁸. The first phrase means ‘a woman is regarded as such’. It means that no matter the situation and events of the day, a woman cannot have authority proportional to that of the husband. The second phrase literally means ‘a woman has a myopic mind’. Semantically, it means that a woman’s mind is so small that she cannot have much authority or authority at all in the family or society. The second phrase is translated as ‘a woman has no authority’. The phrase is categorical and clearly shows that no matter the intellectual and economic status of a woman, she cannot wield any authority in the family or society. Clearly shows that the Konkomba world is a world of men. Umupu mu saba in Konkomba literally mean what is the worth of a woman?’ The semantic import is that every woman, regardless of her position or financial wealth, technically, does not have any authority in the society or family. The literal meanings of these phrases are deceptive and provocative. The real meaning is that, for a human being to be regarded as such, he or she must have authority of some sort. Since it is authority that distinguished human beings from other animals, then a female by implication is not a human being because, technically, she has no authority in the family or society. These phrases and many more emphasize the fact that the society does not recognize or assign authority of any sort to females

¹⁹. Jonathan Ntigma [personal communication at the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra]. 8th July 2004.

²⁰. Jonathan Ntigma [personal communication at the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra]. 8th July 2004.

²¹. Tait, op.cit., p. 128

²². Talton, op.cit., p.55

In November 1917 the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories described the Konkomba as: "the Irish of Togoland. Pure love for fighting sake is at the bottom of most of the disturbances that occur, and the young Konkomba has recourse to his bow and poisoned arrows as joyously and light-heartedly as the Irish to his 'shillelagh'. He sets little value on human life and a remark made by a Konkomba with regard to a farm dispute is typical of his attitude toward it – Better a few dead men than empty stomach. Blood feuds are handed on from father to son and, I understand, flourished unchecked under the German regime"²⁶

The prospects of yam business in the Konkomba Yam Market promoted yam production as the Konkomba have expanded their farms tremendously in order to obtain high yields for sale at Konkomba Yam Market.

Ntigma argues that until the establishment of the Konkomba Yam Market, most of his kinsmen was subsistence farmers. But with the establishment of the Market and its impact on the size of farms of the Konkomba farmer, they have become economically oriented than any ethnic group in the Northern Region, and that since any disturbance in the region would affect their agricultural activities and economic fortunes, the Konkomba have begun to embrace peace as a necessary ingredient for their economic progress.²⁷ The progress of the Konkomba Yam Market has elevated the business acumen of the Konkomba and transformed them considerably into active competitive traders.

The Konkomba Yam Market has also raised the level of western education among the Konkomba. Traditionally, Konkomba were less inclined to enroll their children in school. Agriculture, rather than western education, was the pivot around which Konkomba life revolved even as late as the 1980s. Until then, Konkomba denied their children access to education as they preferred to keep them to work on farmlands. The few who had access to education were mostly those with physical disabilities. Though the first few Konkomba educated elites such as Isaac Bawa, Nakoja Samuel, Samson Mankron, Budale Bikaem, and Daniel NeinaNobor played pioneering and prominent roles in raising the level of education among the Konkomba, the impact of the Konkomba Yam Market on education among the Konkomba has been remarkable.²⁸ It served as an abode and income generation avenue for Konkomba students from other parts of the country who thronged Accra to attend remedial classes or November-December WAEC/WASSCE examinations.²⁹

The heterogeneous nature of the population and traders in the yam market has also had a tremendous impact on the Konkomba. The Konkomba, who hitherto were less inclined to learn and speak other languages, especially Twi, began to speak Twi, Fante and Ga fairly well. This was a direct result of their daily interactions with other ethnic groups who spoke these languages. Unlike their kinsmen in the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra, a majority of the Konkomba back home do not speak any other language apart from *Likpakpalm*, (the Konkomba language). The multilingual nature of the Konkomba Yam Market has enhanced their businesses and status as they were able to communicate quite fluently with different people, not of their kind, on private and public matters. This also improved their ability to effectively manage their political, social, economic and religious issues without having to use interpreters. Though there are some occasions when two or more Konkomba in the Konkomba Yam Market communicated in Twi, Ga or Fante, they still retained their linguistic identity as Konkomba.

Apart from retaining their linguistic identity, the Konkomba in the Yam Market have generally held on to other aspects of their tradition and culture.

They have been able to do so by periodically organizing their cultural activities such as the *kinachun* dance, often patronized by Konkomba both in the yam market and in other parts of Accra. This dance, mostly performed by the *kinachun* cultural troupe, has become part of their social activities such as weddings, outdoorings, funerals and meetings of the Konkomba. The flamboyant costume of the *kinachun* dance and cultural troupe attracted the interest of many organizations, which sometimes requested its services to grace their functions.

²³ ADM56/1/177 Appendix to the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories' Informal Diary for November 1917.

²⁴ Jonathan Ntigma [personal communication at the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra]. 8th July 2004.

²⁵ These first Konkomba Educated elite formed the Konkomba Student Association while at School, which later transmuted into the Konkomba Youth Development Association. For more details of the activities of these personalities, the primordial and activities of the Konkomba Youth Development Association see Benjamin A. Talton: "Food to Eat and Pito to Drink: Education, Local Politics and Self – Help Initiatives in Northern Ghana, 1945- 1972", in the Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, New Series, No. 7 2003, pp. 205-229

²⁶ Dominic Dagbanja [personal communication at Univ. of Ghana, Legon campus]. July 17, 2004.

In addition, the Konkomba community in the Yam Market generally mirrored *Kekpakpam* in respect of their diet. *Bisaa* which is one of the Konkomba staple diets is the commonest food in the market.³⁰ *Konkombapito* was also the commonest local beer in the yam market.³¹ During Konkomba functions, *pito* was the preferred beer for both the Konkomba and their visitors or guests. The Market thus became the centre of Konkomba “social and economic life for the increasing Konkomba population outside of *Kekpakpaan*.”³²

The Konkomba Yam Market and the Ghanaian Society

The establishment of the Konkomba Yam Market and the subsequent migration of the Konkomba, the Nanumba, the Dagomba and the Gonja to the Market have positively transformed their ruptured relations. Perhaps, Accra being a neutral ground and offering the benefits of city life, tamed their individual ethnic pride. Whereas ethnic pride, identity and consciousness determined the relations between the feuding ethnic groups in the Northern Region, commercial considerations and, in general, exposure to a different atmosphere shaped their relations in the Konkomba Yam Market. Hence, the Konkomba, the Dagomba and the Nanumbahave worked together in the Konkomba Yam Market to promote their commercial interests. It is worth noting that, this understanding and cooperation demonstrated in Accra did not happen among their kinsmen back home in the Northern region except those working in the public sector. In the Konkomba yam market, Nanumba and Dagomba *Kakayee* (head porters) were the confidants of and even cooked for the Konkomba Market Queens and Kings. Though some petty disagreements still arose occasionally between some Konkomba, Nanumba and Dagomba, which sometimes took ethnic dimensions, there was generally peaceful co-existence among them. One can conclude that the Konkomba Yam Market created a neutral platform for feuding ethnic groups in the Northern Region to patch up their differences and embrace peaceful co-existence. The relations between the Konkomba, Nanumba and Dagomba in the Konkomba Yam Market provided a perfect example for the government and conflict resolution experts seeking lasting solutions to the many conflicts in the Northern Region.

The Konkomba yam market is not only the home of the Konkomba in Accra, but also that of almost all ethnic groups from the Northern Region. Many businessmen, school leavers and job seekers who traveled from the North to Accra and did not have relatives or friends to live with, found temporary shelter at the Konkomba Yam Market, while they made efforts to secure permanent accommodation elsewhere. Indeed, the Konkomba Yam Market is the *Saboba* or *Kekpakpam* in Accra as it has the highest population of the Konkomba located outside their homeland.³³ In fact, the *Kayayee* who operate around the two Makola Markets in Accra live in the Timber Market, Konkomba Yam Market and Tudu. According to Franklin Hammond, the Konkomba Yam Market was the second largest place of accommodation for the *Kayayee* working in the Makola Number One Market in Accra.³⁴ Besides, the Market was the destination for all cargo and passenger vehicles from the Northern Region to Accra. Hammond asserts that: “the timber yam market with 40%, accommodates the highest number of these women *Kayayee*, followed by the Konkomba Yam Market with 18%, Kantamanto with 14% and Tudu with 8%.”³⁵

Patience Tweneboah’s study of the causes and consequences of Rural – Urban migration with reference to the *Kayayee* in the Makola and Kantamanto Markets in Accra revealed that the *Kayayee* first settled at Market places and Lorry stations, which were invariably located in the Konkomba Yam Market and the Timber Markets.³⁶ She further asserts that 74% of her respondents resided in the Market places.³⁷

²⁷ *Kekpakpamis* a Konkomba term, which refers to Konkomba, state or land while *bisaa* is fufu. The Konkombafufu is made of yam only. Hardly do they add cocoyam or cassava to it.

²⁸ *Pito* is local brewed beer of the Konkomba.

²⁹ Taltpn, B. 2010. *Politics of Social Change in Ghana: The Konkomba Struggle for Political Equality*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 159

³⁰ Saboba is the capital of the Konkomba and the residence of the Chaborborti, the paramount chief of the Konkomba.

³¹ Hammond, F. 1999. “The Plight of Carrier – Women (*Kayayee*) in the Marketing Centers of the Greater – Accra Region: A Case Study of 31st December Makola Market”. Long Essay, Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, Legon, p. 41

³² Ibid

³³ Tweneboah, P. 1994. “The Causes and Consequences of Rural – Urban Migration with Reference to *Kayayees* (Female Porters) in the Makola and Kantamanto Markets in Accra”. Long Essay, Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, Legon, p.59

³⁴ Ibid., p.60

Apart from the fact that the Konkomba Yam Market was seen as the *Kekpakpam* in Accra, it was also the destination and point of departure for almost all cargo and passenger vehicles to and from the Northern Region. This development made the Konkomba Yam Market the meeting and reference point for almost all persons from the Northern Region.

The Konkomba Yam Market also served as the common rallying ground for national politics in Konkomba settlements outside the Northern and Volta Regions of Ghana. The Market was the single largest settlement of the Konkomba away from their homelands. The cream of the Konkomba educated elite and other prominent people converged at the Yam Market to meet their kinsmen to deliberate on issues pertaining to their general welfare. The effectiveness of a political party's campaign in the Konkomba settlements in the Northern and Volta Regions of Ghana depended on its success in the Konkomba Yam Market. This was suggestive of the fact that winning the support of the main cream of the Konkomba elite and other prominent personalities in the Yam Market was key to the success of a party's campaign drive in the Konkomba settlements in the hinterland of the country and invariably helped to secure the support of the Konkomba.

The impact of the Konkomba Yam Market on the Ghanaian society was not entirely positive. The booming commercial activities in the Yam Market attracted people from different parts of the country to settle in the area referred to as *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, which were generally regarded as part of the Yam Market. Though the peripheral areas of the Market were not legally part of the Yam Market, people erroneously referred to them as such. The economic activities in the Konkomba Yam Market have also attracted illegal squatters to the Gbese We Stool Land. These illegal settlers or squatters at Sodom and Gomorrah have been blamed for many of the crimes and social vices that the area has been noted for. Sodom and Gomorrah have been described as dens of armed robbers and other hardened criminals in the country.³⁸ Confirming this view, Chief Inspector Agyemang of the Old Fadama Police Station added that two armed robbers who had been on the police wanted list in connection with a robbery case at Mpraeso in the Eastern Region sought refuge at Sodom and Gomorrah. They were later arrested upon a tip-off and were returned to Mpraeso.³⁹ Again, in 2003 about fifty (50) suspected armed robbers were arrested in the area by a combined team of military and police for screening and prosecution.⁴⁰ The increasing number of armed robbers and other social deviants at the peripheries of the Yam Market alarmed Konkomba leaders, who donated a two-room apartment in the Market to be used as the Old Fadama Police Post in 2000.⁴¹ With an initial number of thirteen personnel, the Old Fadama Police Post took steps to fight against crime in the Yam Market. In June 2004 alone, two hundred and thirty-two (232) crime cases were either recorded or dealt with by the Old Fadama Police Post.⁴²

The congestion created by the illegal squatters in the areas around the Konkomba Yam Market has also made the area prone to frequent fire outbreaks. Reports by the Regional Office of the Fire Service in Greater-Accra indicate that the Konkomba Yam Market was among the places with a high incidence of fire disasters in Accra.⁴³ For example, between 27th July 1996 and 18th November 2000, twenty cases of fire outbreaks were recorded at the area alone causing extensive damage to property.⁴⁴

The fire outbreaks that occurred in the area on 17th September 2001, damaged property worth (Ghc 2,000.00) two thousand Ghana Cedis.⁴⁵ Similarly, estimates of property damaged after fire outbreaks which occurred at the area on 20th September 2001 and 19th August 2003 were put at (Ghc. 5,000.00) five thousand Ghana Cedis (Ghc. 6,500.00) and six thousand – five hundred Ghana Cedis respectively.⁴⁶

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Chief Inspector Agyemang of Old Fadama Police Station [personal communication]. 12th July 2004.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Interview with Chief Inspector Agyemang, Old Fadama Police Station, on 12th July 2004.

⁴¹ *Report on Inadequate Protection for Operational Firemen during Fighting at Konkomba Market, Accra between 27th July 1996 and 18th November 2000.*

⁴² Appendix to *Fire Service's Report on Inadequate Protection for Operational Firemen during Fighting at Konkomba Market, Accra between 27th July 1996 and 18th November 2000*, pp.1-3

⁴³ *Report on Incidence of Fire at the Konkomba Yam Market for 2001*

Conclusion

The genesis of the Konkomba Yam Market is traceable to the activities of Osumanu Tamalbe, a native of Nakpayili in the Nanumba District in the Northern Region of Ghana. The Market was created in 1981, first on the compound of the Ayalolo Primary School and later moved to its present site in 1982 for security reasons. The study revealed that fears of the ripples of the Nanumba – Konkomba ethnic conflict in 1980 influenced the decision to relocate the Konkomba Yam Market. The study also established that the Konkomba Yam Market changed the outlook and orientation of the Nanumba and Dagomba on the one hand and the Konkomba on the other, from holding on to ethnic pride and consciousness to striving for economic and financial progress. Thus, while the Konkomba regarded the Nanumba and the Dagomba back home in the Northern region with suspicion, at the Konkomba Yam Market in Accra these ethnic groups interacted freely with each other which fostered their collective business interests. This change in outlook and orientation played a significant role in healing the wounds and fostering peaceful co-existence among them. This could serve as an example worth emulation by government, NGOs and individuals who are working for lasting solutions to the ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region.

The study further established that, the economic activities in the Konkomba Yam Market also attracted social deviants and hardened criminals such as armed robbers to the area.

Finally, life and exposure of the Konkomba community in the Yam Market influenced a re-thinking of certain Konkomba cultural practices. New lifestyles which were reflected in the cross cultural marriages broadened the Konkomba perspective on marriage and showed the obsolete nature of their marriage customs. However, these changes generated at the Konkomba market, though very slow were largely emulated by their kinsmen back home in Northern Region.

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