

Inter-Ethnic Conflicts and their Impact on National Development, Integration and Social Cohesion: A Study of the Nawuri-Gonja Conflict in Northern Ghana

Cletus Kwaku Mbowura

Lecturer
Department of History
University of Ghana
Ghana

Abstract

For many years Northern Region of Ghana has been in a state of turmoil and atrophy due to intermittent inter-ethnic conflicts over a broad layer of issues. In 1991 and 1992, Kpandai and its surrounding areas in present-day Kpandai District in Northern Ghana were enmeshed in inter-ethnic conflict between the Gonja and the Nawuri over allodial land rights. Apart from the loss of human lives and property, the war disrupted economic and socio-cultural activities, and caused internal displacement of people with its attendant social and economic repercussions. For close to two decades after the inter-ethnic conflict, the rippling effects of the war continued to be pronounced. This paper discusses the outcomes and impact of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, and argues that its outcomes and impact were devastating and rippling on rural life and society, and that they posed a challenge to national development, national integration and social cohesion.

Keywords: development, Gonja, integration, inter-ethnic, Kpandai, national, Nawuri, Northern Ghana, security, social cohesion

1. Introduction

Northern Region of Ghana is an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous area – it consists of a medley of over sixteen different ethnic groups of different cultural, historical and religious background. The ethnically plural structure of Northern Region of Ghana poses a challenge to peaceful co-existence. It creates the opportunity for ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ such as traditional political leaders, chiefs, youth association executives and leaders as well as the educated elite to provide the leadership for the mobilization of ethnic groups into collective actors. These ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’ exploited the local political order, history as well as social space networks to mobilize individuals into collective actors. The conflicting ethnic cultural and social structures in the region create an environment for constant engagement of rival ethnic interests. In addition, ethnic pluralism in the region creates a situation whereby ‘interactions between the state and society assume a constant engagement of rival interests in the contemporary political arena among various groups that have mobilized to secure public resources from those in authority at the political centre’ (Rothchild 1997: 3). The competing cultures, clash of identity, and ethnicity create conflict scenarios through which ethnic resources are mobilized for inter-group or inter-ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana. The result is that the region has been enmeshed in inter-ethnic conflicts over the past three decades marked by phenomenal increases in mayhem and the destruction of lives and property.

The causes of ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana are varied. They include competition for chieftaincy positions and litigation over rights of land tenure (Tsikata and Seini 2004: 4). Other Scholars have explained inter-ethnic conflicts within the framework of the struggle for autonomy, litigation over land tenure system, chieftaincy disputes, competition for power and the demand for representation on local and national government bodies (Tonah 2005: 101). Since 1980 the Northern Region of Ghana has witnessed intermittent eruptions of inter-ethnic conflicts and:

the tolls in terms of lives lost, injuries to residents, destruction of property including loss of critical social and economic infrastructure that the conflicts have caused have been staggering (Brukum 2001: 1).

There have been wars between the Nanumba and the Konkomba in 1981, 1994 and 1995; between the Bimoba and the Konkomba in 1984, 1986 and 1989; between the Nawuri and the Gonja in 1991 and 1992; and between the Konkomba, the Nawuri, the Bassari and the Nchumuru, on the one hand, and the Gonja on the other in 1992.

International and local actors' attention has been focused on dealing with conflicts in Africa. Conflict management and prevention are carried out by many actors (domestic and external) in the international arena to deal with conflict issues in Africa. Actors such as the United Nations Organization, African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), individual states or groups of states, Religious Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), among others, have been involved in conflict prevention in Africa. This was done in many ways including the use or deployment of security forces for peace-enforcement purposes. In the 1990s alone, "the United Nations Security Council has sent nine peacekeeping missions to Africa" (Zartman 2000: 2). The continent itself has also played a prominent role in organizing peacekeeping forces to forestall conflicts in many parts of Africa (Zartman 2000: 2).

Ghana's internal security experience shows that peacekeeping in conflict-torn areas has been the burden of the state. By and large, government's response to conflicts in Northern Ghana took the form of the creation of a military and a police task force to maintain security, law and order, but in some instances it was done belatedly. For instance, in 1994 when inter-ethnic conflicts broke out in seven districts in the Northern Region of Ghana, Government intervention was made after ten days of fighting (Linde & Naylor 1998: 40). The Government declared a state of emergency and peacekeeping troops were deployed to the conflict districts (Linde & Naylor 1998: 40). The delay was blamed on the lack of communication between districts and central government as well as the failure of Regional authorities to clearly acknowledge or quickly act upon reports submitted or transmitted by government officials, political leaders and chiefs in the local areas (Linde & Naylor 1998: 41).

2. Significance of the Study for National Development

Ethnic conflicts contribute to growing violence and civil strife in society, and thus threaten peace and security in Ghana. Violent conflicts in Africa impair development programmes and are largely responsible for the "underdevelopment of large sections of the population in West Africa" (Tonah 2005: 102). It is argued that "chieftaincy disputes and ethnic conflicts in the Northern part of the country [Ghana] are partly to blame for the widespread poverty and the poor state of infrastructure in the area" (Tonah 2005: 102). Symptomatic of violent conflicts, the Nawuri-Gonja conflict disrupted economic activities, caused internal displacement problem, stalled infrastructural developments, disrupted educational calendar and local government activities, thus contributing to the national development quagmire. This study provides useful insights into the devastating effects and impact of violent inter-ethnic conflicts in society. Through the grim and destructive picture of the effects of the conflict, this paper raises tangible questions about security arrangements in the communal violence, and argues that, like all inter-ethnic conflicts, the Nawuri-Gonja conflict posed a challenge to national development, national integration and social cohesion.

3. Methodology

The study adopts the orthodox interpretative and qualitative method of data collection. It combined archival research with published materials and blended them with oral evidence obtained from the field. Primary data for the study were obtained from newspapers, reports of committees of enquiry, petitions, memoranda, Kpandai District Assembly's reports and field researches while oral evidence, which was sometimes fraught with the problem of feedback, was obtained from informants in Kpandai, Salaga, Kafaba and Kalendi. The field research, conducted from 2010 to 2012, was in the form of interviews, and the data derived thereof were transcribed into English and edited. Library research was conducted to obtain information from secondary source materials.

4. Historical Background of the Inter-Ethnic Conflict between Nawuri and Gonja

Kpandai area in the Northern Region of Ghana in present-day Kpandai District, known in most records as Alfai, is located in the eastern corridor of the Northern Region of Ghana. Nawuri territory borders on the Northern part of Volta Region. To the East, West, South and North it shares common boundaries with the Achode/Chanla, Nchumurus, Krachi and Nanumba, respectively. This territory was the scene of a destructive inter-ethnic conflict between the Nawuri (autochthones) and the Gonja (immigrants and overlords) in 1991 and 1992.

Like most inter-ethnic conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana, the root causes of the conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja have been traced to the colonial policy of indirect rule introduced in the Northern Territories in 1932, which subsumed the Nawuri under the Gonja as part of the colonial government's effort of rationalizing existing social and political structures for administrative purpose (Ladouceur 1979: 43). By and large, the implementation of indirect rule led to a situation whereby:

numerous and unassimilated groups such as the Nawuri, Nchumuru, Mo and Vagla, were grouped under the Gonja chiefs; large numbers of Konkomba and Chakosi were made subject to the Dagomba kingdom; the Frafra and B'Moba to the paramount chief of Mamprusi; and the Dagarti and Sisala in the Wala District to the Wala chiefs. In this way the British hoped to rationalize existing social and political structures for administrative purpose (Ladouceur 1979: 43).

The indirect rule system introduced in the administration of Northern Ghana in 1932 allowed centralized states to consolidate their power over the subsumed ones, as a result of which the Nawuri, for example, lost their sovereignty. As overlords, the Gonja also claimed allodial rights to Nawuri lands. From 1932 a state of conflict existed between the two ethnic groups as they contested jurisdictional authority and allodial rights in Alfai.

Remarkable of all the structures of indirect rule was the territorial administrative system. By this, traditional boundaries were redefined to make them coterminous with, and tangential to, administrative boundaries of districts. The "territorialization" of traditional authority drastically changed the political map of the Northern Territories as smaller states were unnaturally amalgamated with bigger ones, leading to the virtual obliteration of their traditional boundaries. The colonial enterprise also put in place measures that supported the centralized states to consolidate their power over the subsumed ones. The British colonial authorities appointed paramount chiefs over the various peoples and districts. The ideal was one for each district. Chiefs were encouraged to visit and cooperate with one another in the hope that their positions and their control over their people would be enhanced (PRAAD (Accra) 56/1/461 Bawku District: Report for the Month of December, 1917, 2; PRAAD (Accra) 56/1/219 Extract from the Chief Commissioner's Memorandum to His Excellency the Governor on Recruiting in the Northern Territories, 1). Besides, the chiefs constituted the local government structures and authority of the colonial government. In the estimation of the colonial authorities, the policy of imposing chiefs on peoples was considerably successful, and that it was due, in part, to the prevailing view that the peoples of the Northern Territories were, on a whole, "an amenable people, living under their tribal chiefs, who in their turn, paid allegiance to their paramount chiefs, through whom the administration worked as far as possible" (PRAAD [Accra] 56/1/219 Extract from the Chief Commissioner's Memorandum to His Excellency the Governor on Recruiting in the Northern Territories, 1).

From 1932 onwards, Gonja rulers assumed positions as political middlemen and cultural brokers in the social pace in Nawuri territory between the various ethnic groups and the colonial and post-colonial governments. Their views resonated in all discussions over chieftaincy and land ownership. This phenomenon eventually made the Gonja to refuse recognition to Nawuri chiefs, assume control over land allocation, and claim allodial land rights to Nawuri territory. As overlords, the Gonja imposed tributes on the Nawuri, demanded recruits from the Nawuri to fight for the British in World War II, and demanded labour services from them (Mbowura 2013: 21-44). This colonial political super-structure, which super-imposed the Gonja over the Nawuri in contravention of history and tradition created the conflict structures between the Nawuri and the Gonja over traditional authority in the Nawuri territory. Gonja rule over the Nawuri was made irreversible as Nawuri attempts between 1932 and 1991 to rectify the anomalous political structure yielded no positive results as both the colonial and post-colonial Governments of Ghana appeared unwilling to dismantle the colonial political super-structure. The failure to rectify the anomalous ruler-ruled relationship between the Gonja and the Nawuri brought them to the brink of war in 1991 from which retreat seemed impossible. The jostling between the Nawuri and the Gonja over political space reached a head in 1991 when war broke out.

5. Security Measures to De-escalate Tension and Prevent the Outbreak of War

In April 1991, the Gonjaland Youth Association was scheduled to hold its conference in Kpandai but the Nawuri protested against such arrangement (Ampiah 1991: part I, 30). Underpinning the Nawuri protest was the festering question of allodial rights in Kpandai and its environs. Their protest was against Gonja claim to allodial rights in Kpandai and its environs connoted by the designation "Gonjaland Youth Association."

Ampiah (1991: part I: 30) suggests that the assertion of the Gonjaland Youth Association that Kpandai and its environs belonged to the Gonja “was so repugnant to the thinking of the Nawuris ... as to arouse in them old and smothered belligerent feelings and their objection to Gonja “overlordship”.

Tension began to mount in the Kpandai area as Nawuri protests gathered momentum. From Kpandai, news of an imminent war between the Nawuri and the Gonja soon trickled down to Salaga, the district capital. Formal reports on the escalating tension in Kpandai were made to the Secretary of the East Gonja District at Salaga on 12 and 13 March 1991 (Memoranda – East Gonja District 1991: 2). It is altruistic that the “most immediate emphasis on institutionalizing conflict management in Africa is bolstering the mechanism’s role in collating information that can provide early warning of impending violent conflict and suggesting potential preventive intervention strategies that can forestall its outbreak” (Sisk in Smock & Crocker [eds.] 1995: 107). Accordingly, the National Security apparatus took measures to acquaint itself with any possible warning signs in order to de-escalate tension and forestall any possible outbreak of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja. First, the District Security Committee (DISEC) of the East Gonja District Assembly carried out a fact finding mission to assess the security situation in Kpandai and its environs (DISEC Situational Report 1991: 1-4), a measure which was in line with the conventional security measures to prevent conflicts (SIPRI UNESCO Handbook 1998: 38). It held four separate meetings with the Gonja, the Nawuri, the Police and Cadres of the Kpandai Zonal Secretariat to find a compromise and to facilitate the peacefully convening of the Gonjaland Youth Association’s in Kpandai (DISEC Situational Report 1991: 1-4). No compromise was reached as the Nawuri threatened to use force to stop the Gonjaland Youth Association conference (Memorandum of the East Gonja District 1991: 2).

In another situational report, DISEC suggested the change of venue of the Gonjaland Youth Association conference, the re-enforcement of security in the Kpandai area, the need for REGSEC to meet with the leadership of the Nawuri and the Gonja in Tamale to strike a compromise, and the interrogation of some Nawuri leaders (Nana Atorsah, Nana Mbimadong, Nana Oklapunye Oklas and Mr. John Asunke) whose presence and acts in the area were deemed as constituting threat to peace in the Kpandai area (DISEC Situational Report on Nawuri Threat 1991: 4). To complement the investigations of DISEC, a second fact-finding mission was carried out by the Bureau of National Investigation (BNI) to determine the security situation in Kpandai and its environs. Its investigations concluded that there was threat to peace in the area and that there were pointers to a possible outbreak of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja over allodial land rights in Kpandai and its environs (Report of the BNI on Nawuri Threat 1991: 1; Ampiah 1991: part I, 31). The report suggested potential preventive intervention strategies that could forestall an outbreak of war between the Nawuri and the Gonja. It suggested the need for a dialogue to reach a compromise to enable the Gonjaland Youth Association to hold its annual conference in Kpandai (Report of the BNI on Nawuri Threat 1991: 4). It was further proposed that a sub-committee be formed at a later date to determine the ownership of Kpandai and other settlements in Alfai (Report of the BNI on Nawuri Threat 1991: 5). Acting upon the recommendations of the BNI, REGSEC immediately established a sub-committee to resolve the dispute over allodial land rights in Kpandai and its environs, invited Nawuri and Gonja leaders to a meeting in Tamale at which it banned the holding of the Gonjaland Youth Association conference at Kpandai (Ampiah 1991: part I, 33), and banned the rights of individuals to possess arms and ammunitions in the Kpandai area (Notes of REGSEC Sub-Committee 1991: 3). It also “strongly cautioned both factions to exercise restraint and avoid any explosive situation (DISEC Situational Report on Nawuri Threat 1991: 4). Finally, REGSEC also dispatched a number of Police personnel to Kpandai on 25 March 1991 to “strengthen the security of the area” and prevent any possible outbreak of communal violence (Memorandum of the East Gonja District 1991: 3). The police searched Nawuri and Gonja homes for firearms and seized them on April 6, 1991. An entry in the Ghana Police Station Diary, Kpandai, for that day confirmed that a “search was made in some unspecified houses in Kpandai and a quantity of firearms was retrieved” (Ampiah 1991: part I, 33).

The security measures outlined to prevent the conflict and de-escalate the tension were part and parcel of the global security system in search of peace, law and order. Nevertheless, the security measures did not prevent an outbreak of communal violence in Kpandai and its surrounding settlements. It would appear that there was little sophistication in the diagnoses of the security situation in Kpandai and its environs to make it possible for the security agents to succeed in the prevention of the conflict between the Nawuri and the Gonja.

The police could not act on intelligence to destroy the possible avenues of preparation for armed confrontation. At dawn of 7 April 1991, the Police received intelligence that the Gonja had offloaded ammunition from the car of Mr. Alhaji Haruna to his house at midnight, but took no action. No attempts were made to seize the firearms, a major flaw that defeated the attempt of the police to disarm the Nawuri and the Gonja (Ampiah 1991: part I, 34). For unknown reasons, the police found it difficult to maintain law and order in Kpandai. For instance, on 7th April 1991 Nawuri and Gonja youth engaged themselves in street fights, but the police found it difficult to disperse them; neither were arrests made (Ampiah 1991: part I, 34). Around mid-morning of 7th April 1991, a street fight broke out between some Nawuri and Gonja women over arguments over allodial rights to lands in Kpandai and its environs. As the embers of the fight began to flicker out, an intense verbal confrontation ensued between some Nawuri and Gonja men over a piece of land previously acquired by the Roman Catholic Mission in Kpandai (Ampiah 1991: part I, 33). The Kpandaiwura (the Nawuri chief of Kpandai) Nana Atorsah Bresiam Okore objected to the attempted sale of the land to motor bike and bicycle mechanics. This resulted in destructive and bloody street fights between Nawuri and Gonja men. In the encounter, two Nawuri men – Kwame Beyifine and Samuel Ntiamoah – were reportedly stabbed by some Gonja men. Gonja casualties included Basiru Tahiru, Barichisu Abdulai and Kasim Lasseni (Ampiah 1991: Exh. X8,1). The incident was reported to the police, but no arrests were made. Besides, police presence in Kpandai was hardly visible (Ampiah 1991: part I, 34) though the Gonja allege that there was a “heavy police presence in Kpandai” (Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix III, 3). The police only acted belatedly to ensure law and order when armed confrontations broke out after Anekor, a Nawuri and the war’s first victim, was shot and killed by Asimani, a Gonja. They attempted to seize firearms and arrest belligerents, but their actions came too late and were ineffective. Despite a re-enforcement of police a day later, the fighting continued for about five days (Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix III, 3).

The war that ensued passed through three phases. The Gonja chased the Nawuri out of Kpandai and its environs in the first phase of the war in April 1991. The Nawuri regrouped, returned to Kpandai and its environs, attacked and chased the Gonja out of the area in June the same year (Ampiah 1991: part I, 36). The Gonja sought refuge at the Kpandai Police Station, but subsequently REGSEC evacuated them to Salaga and its environs (Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix III, 3). In May 1992, the Gonja attempted to re-occupy Kpandai and its environs. Known as the third phase of the conflict, Gonja attempt to re-occupy Kpandai and its environs in May 1992 was unsuccessful and led to many casualties (Linde & Naylor 1998: 35; *The Mirror*, 6 June, 1991: 7). The Nawuri and their allies pursued them to the Police Station and massacred them as the police, overawed and outnumbered, found it impossible to rescue them (Ampiah 1991: Appendix 12, 1). The Gonja accuse the police for acting unprofessional and failing to protect them, a situation which led to the massacre of about seventy Gonja warriors in the war (Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix III, 4).

6. Outcomes of the Conflict

Sub-Saharan African countries grapple with the attempt to improve the socio-economic welfare of their nationals through the provision of social amenities such as health facilities, education, internal security and infrastructure. They also face the challenge of transforming the disparate ethnic groups into a consolidated national polity devoid of ethnicity and ethnic consciousness. The violent inter-ethnic conflict between the Nawuri and Gonja compounded the Government of Ghana’s attempt to improve social welfare in Northern Ghana. It also contributed to the accentuation ethnic consciousness, animosity and antagonism, which ultimately hamper national integration.

The Nawuri-Gonja conflict ended with the loss of many human lives. In the first and second phases of the conflict, the death toll was put at twenty, eleven of whom were Gonja, six Nawuri and three belonging to other ethnic groups (Ampiah 1991: part I, 37). The number increased to seventy-eight when hostilities resumed in 1992 (Linde and Naylor 1998: 35). There are suggestions that the death toll is higher than reported. Some sources put the death toll to one hundred (*Daily Graphic* 1992, 25th May Issue). Apart from loss of human resources, precious energies and time that could be utilized on viable economic activities were lasted in the communal violence. Alongside the loss of human lives was the loss of material property. Property such as houses, physical cash, motor bikes, bicycles and vehicles, among others, belonging to both factions were burnt or looted during the war. In all, three hundred and twenty-three (323) houses in the Kpandai area were burnt down in the wake of the conflict (Ampiah 1991: part I, 37).

Other pieces of property destroyed included two tractors, a corn mill, a flourmill, two old Bed Ford trucks, one Mercedes Benz car, and a tractor, and a cargo vehicle belonging to the Nawuri and the Gonja (Ampiah 1991: part I, 37; *Daily Graphic* 1992, 25th May Issue; Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix II, 3). These wanton destructions of lives and properties no doubt pose a serious challenge to national development.

The conflict caused internal displacement of people. Most of the Nawuri fled from their settlements and sought refuge in Nkwanta and Nanumba Districts. The bulk of the refugees were in Nanumba District in places such as Tampoai (Tampoaye), Kajasu, Kpengasei, Jimang, Lungni, Wulensi and Bimbilla. The Nkwanta District alone harboured about four thousand, five hundred refugees in Kecheibi, Tutukpene, Ketane, and Kpasa. A few others were found in Nkwanta and Damanko (*Daily Graphic* 1992, 24th April Issue: 16). The Gonja also sought refuge at Salaga and Kpembe (Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix III, 3). In the wake of the insecurity and desertions, schools were closed down indefinitely. This destabilized academic calendar and jeopardized academic aspirations of pupils and students (Mbowura 2002: 199-200). Indeed, Nawuri students in Salaga Secondary School could not write their final year examinations as they fled the Gonja-controlled town in the wake of the war, and no contingency arrangements were made for them (*Daily Graphic* 1994, 11th June Issue: 9).

The conflict also brought strains to bear on Government's Recurrent Budget. As of June 1994 the Government was said to have spent 5.05 billion old Ghana Cedis (an equivalent of 505, 000 new Ghana Cedis) on the operations to restore peace, law and order in the Northern Region of Ghana in general due to the outbreak of widespread inter-ethnic conflicts (*Daily Graphic* 1994, 11th June Issue: 9). This excludes the millions of Cedis spent by Government bodies that investigated and attempted to resolve the conflict. On the whole, the cost to the nation of maintaining, investigating and resolving the conflict was considerable, and "a big drain on the already unstable national budget" (Awedoba 2009: 173).

Economic activities ground to a halt as people lived in constant fear. Sale of yams produced by the majority of farmers became a problem because the yam buyers who were mostly from the South feared to go to the area. The glut of the produce significantly reduced rural incomes. Crops could not be harvested and many of the harvests were left on the farms to rot (Awedoba 2009: 173). This cast a gloom over the farming industry (Mbowura 2002: 198). All the three phases of the war erupted at the peak of the farming season: a time when new farms were prepared. The 1991 farming season was characterized by poor harvests because of the insecurity in the area. Some farmers could not prepare land for the cultivation of foodstuff. Obviously, in the short and long runs, this affected agricultural activities in the area due to lack of planting materials and incentives, neglect of farms and many others (Mbowura 2002; 199), which had serious implications for the country at large. As Awedoba (2009: 173) puts it, given that the Kpandai area is a yam producing area, "the result was bound to have repercussions beyond the area, especially in parts of Southern Ghana where yam has become a popular dietary item."

The war destroyed social cohesion among the Nawuri and Gonja. Inter-ethnic marriages and familial ties between the two ethnic groups were broken and traumatized as animosities and questions of identity supplanted love, romance and rapport (Mbowura 2002: 201; Awedoba 2009: 172). Figures of broken Nawuri-Gonja marriages are non-existent, but informants stressed that few of such marriages survived the conflict. They argue that the spate of broken inter-marriages between the Gonja and Nawuri in the wake of the conflict illustrated the point that the conflict was a serious obstacle to a violence-free redefinition of the relationship between the two ethnic groups, a serious challenge to national integration. Obviously, "the social and psychological implications for children caught in-between (the intermarriages) are not hard to fathom" (Awedoba 2009: 172).

Besides, from 1991 to 1998 the Nawuri and the Nchumuru refused to pay taxes to the East Gonja District (Mbowura 2002: 200). They alleged that the Gonja appropriated the District's revenues or siphoned funds from the District to purchase armaments to fight them (Mbowura 2002: 200). Undoubtedly, the refusal of the Nawuri and the Gonja to pay taxes to the East Gonja District robbed it of adequate revenue to initiate its development programmes. In addition, the conflict also affected political activities. In addition, as peace in the Kpandai area could not be guaranteed in the wake of the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, nationwide District Assembly Elections scheduled for 22nd March 1994 could not be conducted in the Kpandai area as the elections in the area were suspended indefinitely by the Electoral Commission of Ghana (Mbowura 2002: 201; Awedoba 2009: 173).

7. Post-Conflict Transformation and Integration

In 1992 REGSEC rolled out a resettlement scheme of the Gonja in Kpandai as part of the processes of peace-building and integration of the Gonja into the society in Kpandai and its environs.

On 5 September 1992, the Gonja were escorted by an armed Security Task Force to Kpandai. The Gonja returnees were accommodated in the New Nkanchina Primary School in Kpandai as Gonja houses in the town were destroyed in the wake of the conflict. The scheme was short-lived, largely due to security reasons. After a couple of weeks, the Gonja were re-evacuated to Salaga.

Nawuri version imputed the failure of the resettlement scheme to the lack of bedding facilities in the Primary School and the failure to integrate the Gonja returnees into the society. Beyond these reasons, the Gonja impute the failure of the resettlement scheme to lack of socialization, lack of freedom, and poor cuisine. The main reason, however, for the failure of the resettlement scheme was the lack of security. There was visible military presence in the New Nkanchina Primary School to protect the Gonja returnees, but it would appear that there were gaps in the security arrangements (Memorandum of the East Gonja District 1991: 3). Both Nawuri and Gonja informants assert that some unidentified armed Nawuri warriors occasionally managed to sneak into the vicinity of the New Nkanchina Primary School and attempted to kill the Gonja returnees. Fearing for their lives, the Gonja returnees demanded an evacuation back to Salaga and its environs. Since then, no further attempts were made to return and resettle the Gonja in Kpandai and its environs. As the Gonja remained un-integrated into the society in Kpandai and its environs, the two ethnic groups continued to live apart in distinct geographical areas as enemies – a phenomenon which ruins social integration and national development efforts.

8. Impact of the Conflict on Nawuri Society

8.1 Dispute Over Abandoned Gonja Houses in Kpandai

For close to two decades after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict, the Kpandai area continued to experience its rippling effects. In all, there were three known issues, which formed the long-term effects of the Nawuri-Gonja war – the appropriation of some Gonja houses in Kpandai, chieftaincy dispute among the Nawuri, and land dispute between Balai and Kpandai.

As the Gonja fled from Kpandai and its environs during the conflict, their houses were appropriated by the Nawuri as war booties, though almost all of them were set ablaze and destroyed (Gonja Memorandum 1994: Appendix III, 3). Later, some of the destroyed houses were rehabilitated and occupied by the Nawuri. The appropriation of the Gonja houses in general was popular among the Nawuri, but it was less so when the structures were rehabilitated for habitation. Signs of ownership crisis began to show in February 2010. One Fulera Adam, who withdrew from Kpandai to Salaga in the company of the Gonja in the war, initiated a suit in the Salaga District Magistrate Court to reclaim her house from a Nawuri occupant (Kpandai District Assembly's Report on Nawuri Protest 2010). The Nawuri were divided over this issue, but a majority of them opposed it. From village to village, the general sentiment of the Nawuri favoured a resistance against Fulera's claim. On February 1, 2010, a group of Nawuri women, who referred to themselves as the "League of Nawuri Women Against Violent Conflict," organized a peaceful demonstration against Fulera's claim of ownership of the house in dispute (Kpandai District Assembly's Report on Nawuri Protest 2010; League of Nawuri Women's Protest 2010). The demonstrators expressed their abhorrence to violent conflict in general and viewed Fulera's action as one that has the potential of rekindling the Nawuri-Gonja conflict (League of Nawuri Women's Protest 2010). The League argued that Fulera's house was a war booty which could not be reclaimed by any means whatsoever, and therefore threatened to marshal its resources to resist the attempt by Fulera and her Gonja cronies to reclaim the house.

The tone of the tussle between the Nawuri and the Gonja over abandoned Gonja houses in Kpandai was set by Fulera's claim, but was heightened by the actions of the Kanankulaiwura. In May, 2010, the Kanankulaiwura accused the Nawuri of wanton destruction and sale of Gonja houses in Kpandai, and challenged the Northern Regional Security Council (REGSEC) to take immediate actions to protect Gonja properties and to avert a looming war (Kpembewura Kibasibil's Petition 2010). It was not known what the response of the Northern Regional Security Council to the petition was. What is known is that the Kpembewura's action brought a paradigm shift. The conflict became a legal, rather than, an armed conflict as the two ethnic groups became embroiled in legal battles in the High Court in Tamale over Gonja houses in Kpandai and its environs. The threat of war by the Kpembewura did not only illustrate the fragility of peace between the two ethnic groups, but also gave indications of the readiness of the two factions to take advantage of any trivial misunderstanding to resume hostilities.

8.2 Chieftaincy Dispute among the Nawuri

Nawuri traditional polity is hierarchically structured. At the apex is the Nawuriwura. He is supported by a litany of sub-chiefs of the various Nawuri settlements. By 1991, the institution of the Nawuriwura was fractured as two rival chiefs existed. The stalemate continued after the war, but the war intensified the crisis, producing devastating repercussions on the institution and Nawuri political front. The dispute began in 1988 when the Kpandai Nawuri community refused to put the office of their chief, Kpandaiwura, in the hands of the Nawuriwura as they had done previously. They therefore installed their own kind as the Kpandaiwura with authority over all inhabitants in Kpandai community. The action of the Kpandai Nawuri therefore meant a curtailment of the authority of the Nawuriwura. The Nkanchina Nawuri, whose turn it was to present a candidate for the position of the Nawuriwura, did not take kindly to the new political arrangement, and described it as illegitimate, usurpation and hypocritical, and asked for a reversal to the old status quo (Mbowura 2002: 57; Ampiah 1991: part I, 59-60).

Efforts to resolve the impasse proved futile, and as the imbroglio over chieftaincy continued, the Nkanchina Nawuri community sought Gonja help and intervention (Ampiah 1991: part I, 59-60). The Gonja seized upon the opportunity and projected Nana Abugabah I both as the Nawuriwura and Kpandaiwura in contravention of Nawuri tradition, custom and history, though no concrete evidence of his installation by the Gonja exists (Ampiah 1991: part I, 60). The dynamics of the political situation began to change considerably as Nana Abugabah began to exert some influence. This was compounded when some Nawuri communities performed rites to acknowledge him as the Nawuriwura. The stalemate led to the bi-polarization of Nawuri political system into pro-Abugabah and pro-Atorsah, respectively, with dire consequences on Nawuri society and the area in general. It assumed wider proportions as the Kpandai District Assembly and the Northern Regional Ministry were accused of supporting Atorsah and masterminding his appointment as the Government appointee on the Kpandai District Assembly (Nana Abugabah's Petition to the Northern Regional Minister 2008; Nana Abugabah's Petition to the President of the Republic of Ghana 2009; Nana Atorsah's Petition to the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development 2011). The crisis also created a controversy over the site of the Kpandai District Assembly, which was created out of the East Gonja District in 2008. As the overlord of Kpandai, the Kpandaiwura allocated a parcel of land for the site of the Assembly in 2008. Nana Abugabah also invoked his powers as the "supposed" Nawuriwura allocated another parcel of land for the same purpose. War nearly broke out between the factions when the committee overseeing the construction of the facilities of the Assembly chose the parcel of land allotted by the Kpandaiwura (Nana Abugabah's Petition to the Minister of the Interior 2008).

Gonja posture to the chieftaincy dispute among the Nawuri was one of opportunism. They interfered by arranging to grant paramountcy to the Nawuri, and promised to confer that on Nana Abugaba. They also orchestrated plans to install supporters of Nana Abugabah as chiefs of all the Nawuri settlements, but the Nawuri condemned the plan of the Gonja as unhistorical, diabolical and a threat to peace in the Kpandai area (Press Conference of Nawuri Chiefs and Elders 2011). The political crisis is significant not only because it destroyed social cohesion among the Nawuri, but because it posed a serious national security concern (*Today* 2011, 22nd September Issue: 11; *The Chronicle* 2009, 6th August Issue: 8). There were threats of war between the Gonja and the Nawuri. It also created security concerns that made it virtually impossible for the Nawuri to go about their normal economic and social activities. Rumours of impending war heightened tensions and inhibited progress among the Nawuri. It was feared that the security situation in Kpandai and its environs could also jeopardize the security in Northern Region in general. The Nawuri claimed that:

war between the Nawuris and the Gonas in 1991 and 1992 have (sic) shown, an outbreak of war between the two ethnic groups would obviously draw other groups into the war in support of one faction or the other ... This may spark off a multitude of ethnic conflicts in the region (*Today* 2011, 22nd September Issue: 11).

Though the Northern Regional Security Council (REGSEC) forestalled the situation by cancelling the conferment of paramountcy on Nana Abugabah, the instability of peace and order in the Kpandai area continues to remain a quagmire and a threat to security in Northern Region in general.

8.3 Land Dispute between Balai and Kpandai

Land litigation between the Nawuri communities of Balai and Kpandai was yet another long-term rippling effect of the Nawuri-Gonja war. As the case is currently in the High Court in Tamale, no detailed analysis of it would be made here. Suffice it to say that the land litigation started as an innocuous dispute over a parcel of land, but soon metamorphosed into a boundary dispute between Balai and Kpandai.

It originated from the supposed attempts of some Balai Nawuri youth to secure some parcels of land in Kpandai to ostensibly stop what they called “the rapid commercialization of land in Kpandai”. The dispute was brought before the Bimbilla District Magistrate Court for hearing but the court entered judgement in favour of the Kpandai Nawuri (Judgement of District Magistrate: Suit No. 46/09). The court’s judgement sparked off mayhem in Kpandai.

Outraged by the court’s verdict, the Balai Nawuri went on rampage in Kpandai. They were reported to have taken “over the principal streets of Kpandai for over three hours” (*The Chronicle* 2009, 6th August Issue: 8). It took contingency measures of the District Security Council (DISEC) to prevent an outbreak of war (*The Chronicle* 2009, 6th August Issue: 8 & 9). War between the Balai and the Kpandai Nawuri did not break out, but the situation still remains volatile and therefore a violent-free society in the Kpandai area cannot be guaranteed, a situation which threatens social cohesion and national integration and development. The significance of the land dispute is not so much in the fact that it could lead to intra-ethnic conflict among the Nawuri over land for the first time in their history, but in the fact that it appeared to have “transformed and transferred” the dispute over allodial land rights between Nawuri and Gonja from an inter-ethnic realm to a localized intra-ethnic one between the Balai and Kpandai Nawuri communities. Apart from posing security threat and polarizing the Nawuri, the Balai-Kpandai land litigation together with the chieftaincy dispute among the Nawuri, weakened Nawuri political authority and control over the settler ethnic groups in the Kpandai area.

9. Lessons

The study provides a lot of useful lessons for policy-makers, advocates for peace and opinion leaders to digest. The effects of the war illustrate the dangers associated with communal violence. There is no doubt that inter-ethnic conflicts result from misunderstandings and disagreements of ethnic groups over a broad layer of issues. Nonetheless, the resort to arms is not without serious repercussions. The long-term effects of the conflict on the Nawuri are a pointer of the fact that ethnic conflicts are inherently non-beneficial, no matter their motivations. The chieftaincy and land disputes in Nawuri society after the conflict have impacted negatively on the Nawuri; they have sapped the unity and strength of their society. The acrimonious relations among the Nawuri and their failure to establish their authority over the settlers after the communal violence are ample illustrations of the fact that the conflict posed a serious challenge to Nawuri social and political structures. The Nawuri-Gonja war is not significant only at the local level; it has far-reaching implications on the national level. The conflict exposed the lapses in Ghana’s internal security networks, and showed the unpreparedness of the security apparatus to deal with conflict situations. Ghana, like other sub-Saharan African countries, is multi-ethnic. The disintegration of inter-Nawuri-Gonja marriages and familial ties in the wake of the conflict compounds the attempts of Ghana since independence to build a nation out of a state of a conglomeration of diverse ethnic groups. As long as inter-ethnic conflicts of the type of the Nawuri-Gonja imbroglio existed in Northern Ghana, national integration would continue to be an illusion and a nightmare. Furthermore, the destruction of human lives in the war has serious implications for national integration. The number of lives lost in the war and the attempts of the Nawuri, supported by the Konkomba, Bassari and Nchumuru, to carry the war into Kpembe and Salaga in 1992 to kill the Gonja were illustrations of the desire to exterminate an ethnic group in violent conflicts. This is a recipe for carnage and national catastrophe. In the light of the repercussions of conflicts on social cohesion, national integration and development, it is imperative that the Government, policy-makers, peace-makers and opinion leaders must endeavour to pre-empt wars, no matter its magnitude

10. Conclusion

The Nawuri-Gonja conflict destroyed social cohesion and had serious implications on national integration and development. It stretched the strength of the security in the Kpandai area and posed problems to the security agencies in the area as they found it difficult to prevent and manage the conflict.

The loss of lives and wanton destruction of properties in the communal violence, the insecurity in Kpandai and its environs, the disruption of rural economy in the area which revolved largely around yam cultivation, the internal displacement of people, jeopardized the progress of the area and ultimately hampered national development and integration. The inter-ethnic animosity, desire for annihilation, and the destruction of inter-ethnic marriages that the conflict engendered are obstacles towards national integration. They hamper co-existence between the Gonja and the Nawuri, and ultimately endanger government’s attempts to transform the disparate ethnic groups in the country into a consolidated polity devoid of the nuances of ethnicity.

Two decades after the conflict it continues to have rippling effects on rural life and society. The conflict has raised serious questions about the ownership of immovable properties, intensified chieftaincy dispute among the Nawuri and created Balai-Kpandai land dispute. The culture of impunity, lawlessness and threat to peace that these disputes engendered are threats to social cohesion at the local level and security at the national level.

References

- Ampiah, J. (1991). *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Gonjas, Nawuris and Nanjuro Dispute*. Accra: Gov. of Ghana.
- Awedoba, A.K. (2009). *An Ethnographic Study of Northern Ghanaian Conflicts: Towards A Sustainable Peace*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Brukum, N.J.K. 2007. Chieftaincy and Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Region of Ghana, 1980- 2002. In Steve Tonah (ed.), *Ethnicity, Conflicts and Consensus in Ghana*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- _____ (2000/2001). Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Ghana: An Appraisal. In *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*. New Series, Nos. 4 &5.
- _____ (1999). Chiefs, Colonial Policy and Politics in Northern Ghana, 1897-1956. In *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*. New Series, No. 3.
- _____ 1995. Ethnic Conflict in Northern Region of Ghana. A Study of the Gonja District, 1980-1994. In M. Oquaye (ed.), *Democracy, Politics and Conflict Resolution in Contemporary Ghana*. Accra: Gold-Type Publications Ltd.
- Bombande, E. 2007. Conflicts, Civil Society Organization and Community Peace Building in Northern Ghana. Steve Tonah (ed.), *Ethnicity, Conflicts and Consensus in Northern Ghana*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- Dixon (1955), Report of Mr. J. Dixon, Administrative Officer Class I, on the Representations Made to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations Organisation, Concerning the Status of the Nawuris and Nanjuros within the Togoland Area of the Gonja District.
- Jonsson, J. (2007). The Overwhelming Minority: Traditional Leadership and Ethnic Conflict in Ghana's Northern Region. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) Working Paper No. 30.
- Linde, Ada van Der and Naylor, Rachel. (1998). *From Conflict to Conciliation: NGOs Consort for Peace in Northern Ghana. A Report for the Northern Ghana Inter-NGO Consortium and Oxfam GB*.
- Mbowura, C.K.(2013). Constructing the Historicity of Chieftaincy among the Nawuri of Northern Ghana. In *Contemporary Journal of African Studies* 1(2), 21-44.
- _____ (2013). Eat Mangoes, Grow Cotton and be Industrious: Interrogating German Colonial Rule in the Nawuri Area of Northern Ghana, 1899 to 1914. In Wazi Apoh and Bea Lundt (eds). *Germany and its West African Colonies: Excavations of German Colonialism in Post-Colonial Times*. Berlin: LIT.
- _____ (2002). Nawuri-Gonja Relations, 1913-1994. University of Ghana: M.Phil Thesis.
- Rothchild, D. (1997). *Managing Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: Pressures and Incentives for Cooperation*. Washington, D.C.: Bookings Institution Press.
- SIPRI-UNESCO Handbook. (1998). *Peace, Security and Conflict Prevention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smock, D.R. & Crocker, C.A. [eds.] (1995). *African Conflict Resolution: The U.S. Role in Peacemaking*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Tonah, S. (2005). Resolving Chieftaincy Succession Disputes and Communal Conflicts in Ghana: Lessons from Mamprugu – Northern Ghana. In *Legon Journal of International Affairs* 2(1), 45-57.
- Tsikata D. and Seini, W. (2004). *Identities, Inequalities and Conflicts in Ghana*. CRISE Working Paper 5.

Letters, Petitions, Memoranda, Press Conferences and News Papers

Report of the BNI, Tamale: “Nawuri Threat to Impending Gonjaland Youth Association Conference Scheduled for Kpandai between 29th and 30th March 1991, dated 18th March 1991.

The East Gonja District Security Committee (DISEC): “Memoranda Presented to the Committee of Inquiry into the Gonja/Nawuris and Nanjuros Conflict”, 1991.

- Kpandai District Assembly: “Report on protest march against the court suit being initiated by madam Fulera Adam to claim ownership of hose number C 28 in Kpandai after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict of 1991/1992” to the Northern regional Minister.
- The League of Nawuri Women Against Violence: “Protest against the court suit being initiated by Madam Fulera Adam to claim ownership of house number C28 in Kpandai after the Nawuri-Gonja conflict of 1991/1992.”
- Kpembewura Kibasibil’s Petition: “Criminal destruction of Gonja houses in Kpandai”, to the Northern Regional Security Council, dated May 8, 2010.
- Petition of Kpandai Nawuri chiefs and Elders: “Petition against the Kpembewura’s claim of houses in Kpandai”, to the president of Ghana, dated September 27, 2010.
- DISEC Memorandum (1991). “Memoranda Presented to the Committee of Inquiry into the Gonja/Nawuris and Nanjuros Conflict by the District Security Committee (DISEC), East Gonja District Assembly”.
- Petition of Nanan Abugabah I: “Re: Adelibam Bunyaluwe aka Dadie and Nine Others and Petition to Transfer Case to Accra”, to the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, dated September 15, 2010.
- Kanankulaiwura Aponnibisee Alhaji Ademu’s Letter to Nana Gyakon Benfiane Nkachina, dated 29 November, 1988.
- Petition of Nana Abugabah I to the Minister of the Interior. 18 June 2008.
- Petition of Nana Abugabah I to the president of the Republic of Ghana, February 16, 2009.
- Petition of Nana Atorsah Bresiam Okore to the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, January 28, 2011.
- Nawuri Chiefs and Elders: “Press Conference on the State of Affairs in the Nawuri Area of Kpandai District of the Northern Region” held on September 21, 2011.
- District Magistrate: Suit No. 46/09 – “Judgement: In the Magistrate Court Held at Bimbilla in the Northern Region on Monday, the 15th Day of July, 2009 before His Worship Mr. Amadu Issifu.”
- The Mirror*, 6 June 1991: “Woes of a Kwatriot – The Massacre up North.”
- Daily Graphic* dated May 25, 1992
- Daily Graphic* June 11, 1994
- Today*, September 22, 2011: “Tribal War Looms: As Gonjas and Nawuris Brace for Showdown.”
- Today*, September 26, 2011: “Nawuris, Gonjas at Peace.”
- The Chronicle*, Vol. 18, No. 213, Thursday, August 6, 2009: “Kpandai Sitting on Time Bomb.”