

**Exclusion, Association and Violence:
Trends and Triggers in Northern Ghana's Konkomba-Dagomba Wars**

Hippolyt A. S. Pul

Graduate Student

Center for Social and Public Policy

Duquesne University

Pittsburgh, PA 15262

E-mail: hippolyt@juno.com

ABSTRACT

Recurrent ethnic violence is common to many countries. For social scientists, recurrence raises important issues. Why are some locales "riot prone" and others not? What triggers riots in places with this tendency? For Varshney, the presence of intra-ethnic organizations and the absence of inter-ethnic institutions increase the likelihood of riot outbreaks. For Wilkinson, political factors, particularly the structure of electoral incentives are a key factor. Horowitz takes a catholic view, holding that once violence becomes endemic, almost any trigger can set it off.

This paper contributes to the debate by focusing on an important but understudied case in northern Ghana. In recent years, Konkombas, Dagombas, and other groups in the region have fought a series of "wars" that cost thousands of lives - a devastating toll in a region with only 1.8 million people, and in a country that has a population little over 18 million. The sporadic fighting has become more frequent, intense and wider in scope since the 1980s and the destruction of life and property more widespread. By official counts, the Konkomba-Bimoba wars of 1984, 1986 and 1989 left 60 people dead, with several hundreds displaced. The Nawuri-Gonja war of 1991 left 78 dead and hundreds wounded. Other wars that took heavy tolls on lives in the same region include the Gonja-Vagla war of 1980; the Konkomba-Nanumba War of 1981; the Mamprusi-Kusasi war of 1982; the Komba-Bimoba War of 1986/87; the Konkomba-Nawuri war of 1990; the Gonja-Nawuri War of 1992; the Konkomba and allies against the Gonjas in 1992; the Konkombas and Mossis in 1993. Finally, the 1994/95 Guinea Fowl War in which modern weapons such as AK47s were widely used, resulted in at least 2,000 people killed, 200,000 internally displaced and 441 villages completely destroyed.

Based on interviews with ethnic leaders, analysis of primary documents, and review of secondary sources, this paper presents the first theoretically informed examination of violence in northern Ghana. The paper charts how changing state policy has affected levels of violence and how state actors themselves have fomented or condoned war. In addition, the paper

examines triggers to violence, in particular the role of civil society organizations. Critical to the intensity and duration of violence are "ethnic youth associations" among the contending groups. Inter-ethnic organizations and outside conflict resolution groups have proved ineffective at best in preventing violence. Finally, we probe the ways in which triggering agents ameliorate or exacerbate the structural issues that undergird violence. We examine, for example, how the cycle of violent conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana has been associated with political changes at the national level. We suggest that recurrent ethnic violence can be understood only by linking analyses of historical contexts to contemporary institutional actors.

Drawing on multiple sources of data, Part I of the paper provides a deeper analysis of the historical context within which the present day conflicts between the Konkombas and Dagombas occur. In particular, it examines how wavering state policies on chieftaincy and land ownership rights have fostered and sustained trends in inter-ethnic exclusion from the colonial period to date; illustrating how these factors have become the building blocks of the interethnic violence between the Konkombas and Dagombas in particular, and other ethnic groups in northern Ghana as a whole.

Part II of this paper takes the analysis of the issues beyond the historical context, to provide a framework for appreciating the role of emergent interest groups in reinventing the ethnic myths and symbols that have sustained hostilities and/or triggered the outbreak of violence in our day. Central to the discussion is the commodification of land, which underscores the politics of inter-ethnic exclusion from political participation in the traditional authority structures of the conflict areas; issues that have escaped the attention of researchers to date. Finally, it considers how popular support for the ethnicized interest group conflicts are secured and sustained through the reinvention of myths and the fetish of ethnic pride, the exploitation of political incumbency and state power, and the use of Media War in the politics of (mis)information.

In Part III the paper looks at the factors that trigger violence among the Konkombas and Dagombas in particular, and in northern Ghana in general. Within this framework, the paper discusses the impact of political rhetoric and uncritical electoral promises that have created expectations that cannot be met without recourse to some form of violence. The role of ethnic leaders, acting under cover of ethnic youth associations, in fueling the arms race is discussed as well. We also examine the unsuspecting role that civil society organizations have played in the past in creating conditions that heighten awareness of inter-ethnic differences and exacerbate tendencies towards violence. It concludes with a discussion of the prospects for building interethnic peace, using the new found power of CSOs as peacebuilders.

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Region of Ghana is spatially the largest single region in the country, covering 29.5% of the total surface area of Ghana (see Map). It has a population of 1,805,428, according to the figures of the 2000 national population census. This makes it the least populated in the country, having only 25.7 persons per kilometer square, against the national average of 78.9 persons/km². Compared with the other two regions in the north, the Upper West has 31.2 people/km² while the Upper East Region has 104 persons/km².

The population of the region is divided between at least seventeen (17) autochthonous and linguistically distinct ethnic groups. According to the 2000 national population and housing census, the Dagomba ethnic group is the largest, with a population of 747,924 out of which 595,865 (or 32.9%) are regular residents in the region. The Konkombas come next with 474,293 people of which 16.9% (i.e. 305,575) regularly live in the region. The statistics presented in Table 1 below will be essential in our understanding of the nature and origins of conflicts discussed in this paper.

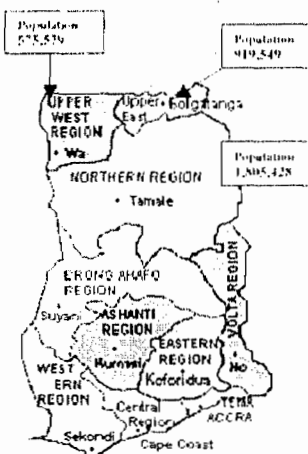


Table 1 Distribution of ethnic Groups in the Northern Region of Ghana

	Ethnic Group	Population National	In N. R	Percentages National	In N. R	Residents in NR as % of Reg. Pop
1	Dagomba	747,924	594,865	4.3	79.5%	32.9%
2	Konkomba	474,293	305,575	2.7	64.4%	16.9%
3	Gonja	211,703	131,814	1.2	62.3%	7.3%
4	Nanumba	78,812	45,414	0.5	57.6%	2.5%
5	Mamprusi	200,393	132,494	1.1	66.1%	7.3%
6	Mo (Deg)	55,174	5,178	0.3	9.4%	0.3%
7	Bimoba	113,130	49,013	0.6	43.3%	2.7%
8	Nchumburu	113,334	13,624	0.6	12.0%	0.8%
9	Bassare	51,299	20,331	0.3	39.6%	1.1%
10	Vagla	41,684	5,205	0.2	12.5%	0.3%
11	Safalba	7,827	2,159	0.4	27.6%	0.1%
12	Chokosi (Anufo)	63,910	35,989	0.4	56.3%	2.0%
13	Birifor	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	#VALUE!
14	Tapulma	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	#VALUE!
15	Hanga	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	#VALUE!
16	Nawuri	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	#VALUE!
17	Koma	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	#VALUE!

Total Regional Population (2000) = 1,805,428¹

Lying further south than the other two regions, and situated in the transition zone between the savannah and forest belts, the Northern Region is better endowed agriculturally, with more fertile lands (quantitatively and qualitatively), better drainage and a more favorable rainfall distribution and duration. These relatively better agricultural potentials make it attractive to people from the other two regions who migrate here for farming purposes. The region's central location in the country also makes its capital city, Tamale, an important cross-point for both internal and external trade. It is therefore reputed to be one of the fastest growing cities in West Africa.

The history of violent conflicts between the Konkombas and Dagombas of Northern Ghana date back to the 16th Century, when the two ethnic groups first came into contact with each other. However, the first recorded wars occurred in 1914, 1917, 1940 and 1946. The issues at stake in these wars varied in nature, at least at the level of proximate causes. For instance, the 1940 war was dubbed the "cow war" while the 1946 one came to be known as the "fish war", because the instigating factors were quarrels over a cow and the rights to fish in a river.

Beyond these seemingly superficial appellations, however, lie deep seated and long-standing interethnic disagreements that have underscored and perpetuated the conflicts onto this day. The 1994/95 Guinea Fowl War showed that the issues that led to the outbreak of the worse ever violent war engulfing several ethnic groups was not the disagreement over the price of a guinea fowl in a local market. The fight was about citizenship rights of whole ethnic groups (*indigeneity and ethnic identity*), recognition of the right to self-rule and the creation of political space to allow participation of all ethnic groups in the traditional institutions of governance (*chieftaincy*), and the redefinition of the ownership of, and control over the major productive resource for 95% of the population of the area (*land*).

These embedded factors have long histories that have manifested themselves in different ways at different times through various trends and triggers. Underlying trends involve ambiguous and wavering state policies on land ownership and chieftaincy rights, while the triggers of violence range from perceived or actual changes in public policy on these issues. Official and unofficial actions and utterances from political leaders, and ethnic elite constitute important triggers of violence as well. An examination of these histories is essential for understanding the perpetuation and increasing intensity of violent conflicts between the Konkombas and Dagombas of northern Ghana in particular, and between the other ethnic wars in general. Such a recapture provides the framework for understanding how local and national actors have become important parts of the architecture of inter-ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana.

PART 1: STATE POLICY, CHIEFTAINCY, LANDOWNERSHIP AND INTER-ETHNIC EXCLUSION:
THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF VIOLENCE IN THE KONKOMBA- DAGOMBA CONFLICTS

1.1 The Chieftaincy Institution in Northern Ghana

Prior to colonial rule, two distinct systems of traditional rule existed in northern Ghana -- the highly centralized systems of the Dagombas, Gonjas, Nanumbas, Walas and Mamprusis, referred to as the 'invader tribes' (Stride & Ifeka 1971:83) on the one hand, and the decentralized systems of the majority of ethnic groups in the north, including the Talensis, Dagaara, Nawuri, Sisaala, Birifors, Konkombas, etc. Typically, the highly structured, militaristic traditional chiefships imported by the 'invader tribes' had clearly defined internal role assignments, rules of succession and set patterns for the distribution of authority and responsibilities. Royal dynasties have constituted the locus of power in these societies, and succession to the seats of power is by patrilineal inheritance. (Staniland, 1975). On the contrary, the decentralized systems had no recognizable single apical head as the locus of political power for the entire ethnic group. In other words, one could not point to a single individual and say this is the chief of the Dagara or Talensis or Konkombas. Instead, the roles and responsibilities attributable to the office of chief in the structured systems devolved unto the most senior male member in the clan. (Rattray, 1932; Fortes, 1940; Arhin, 1985). In all cases, the mantle of headship of the entire ethnic group fell on several clanheads-in-council. This constituted the basis of their being described as "acephalous" - i.e. without a head² (Rattray, Ibid; Fortes Ibid; Tait, Ibid; Arhin, Ibid).

In certain parts of the north such as among the Tallensi, the Government gave judicial and administrative powers to certain persons who had not had such powers before the colonial period. The people living in these areas regarded the Government-appointed 'chief' as illegitimate and resented the orders which they, nonetheless, had to carry out for fear of the Government's army and police"

Arhin, Kwame 1985:93

Despite years of coexistence, the two traditional systems of governance remained distinct from each other. With the advent of colonial rule in 1899, however, the need for control over a vast landmass forced the British to attempt to streamline and universalize the chieftaincy system in the north. As Irvine, Provincial Commissioner, South, noted in his handing over notes to his successor in 1909:

As it is impossible to govern the country successfully except through the chiefs, every endeavour should be made to strengthen their hands in their dealings with their people as far as it is compatible with equity and good governance" (cited in Staniland, p. 58)³

This statement gave birth to the principle of indirect rule in northern Ghana. However, Governor Gordon Guggisberg was probably the first to clearly articulate the official colonial policy on indirect rule in the following words:

Our policy must be to maintain any Paramount Chiefs that exist and gradually absorb under these any small communities scattered about. What we should aim at is that some day the Dagombas, Gonjas and Mamprusis should become strong native states. Each will have its own little Public Works Department and carry on its own business with the Political Officer as a Resident and Adviser. Each state will be more or less self-contained (Ibid p. 58).

To move policy into programs, Guggisberg specifically instructed:

"... the Chief Commissioner to draw up and submit to me in due course a policy for the Northern Territories showing a definite scheme for fostering the formation of these big states without compulsion" (Ibid. p.58).

Clearly, the choice of Dagbon, Mamprugu, Nanumba and Gonja as the hub around which the policy was woven was principally because of their prominence as centralized chiefships. To facilitate their grip on the decentralized groups, the colonial officers encouraged and supported the co-opted chiefships to appoint and/or post sub chiefs to all the communities/settlements of the decentralized ethnic groups. In some cases, the chiefs were appointed from among the local ethnic groups. Nonetheless, the practice failed to "universalize" the chieftaincy institution as defined by the British. For instance, the appointment of Konkombas as chiefs and headmen among their people had no impact on the local population because the Konkombas saw Dagomba-appointed chiefs as impositions. Such chiefs had no legitimate authority over them, unless they happened to be elders of the Konkombas (Tait, 1961). As a result, Dagomba rule over Konkombas was ineffective, at best. As Staniland (1975:5) notes:

...despite this assertion of suzerainty, the Dagomba kingdom seems never to have exercised close control over the Konkomba: administration took the form of slave raiding and punitive expeditions. The Konkombas were by no means assimilated. Relations between them and the Dagomba were distant and hostile: there was little, if any mixing by marriage.

This state of affairs remained in force from its inception until the 1950s, when an elected government took over control of the country from the

British. This set the stage for a major change in policy that would reverberate through the history of conflicts in northern Ghana.

In line with its socialist policies, the government of the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) under Kwame Nkrumah tried to centralize political power in the national government. Nkrumah's government was openly hostile towards chiefs, as they saw them as the vestiges of the colonial era. Accordingly, the government actively sought to weaken the chieftaincy institution through legislation and various forms of administrative control. For instance, the local government reforms that were introduced under the Local Government Ordinance of 1951, the State Council Ordinances of 1952 and the Municipal Council Ordinances of 1953 were all designed to erode the economic power base of chiefs by annexing stool lands and curtailing the discretionary use of revenue from such lands. As Kwame Baffour-Authur notes, "[...]Under the Local Government Ordinance of 1951, elected local councils replaced native authorities. Powers of chiefs were consequently eroded"⁴.

The trend continued after independence in 1957 with the passage of *The Akim Abuakwa (Stool Revenue) Act, 1958 (Act 8)*, *The Ashanti Stool Act, 1958 (Act 28)*, *The Chiefs (Recognition) Act of 1959*, *the Stool Lands Control Act, 1960 (Act 79)*, *the Administration of Lands Act, 1962 (Act 123)* and *the Concessions Act, 1962 (Act 124)*.

These pieces of legislations ensured the State's total control of stool lands under the CPP government and effectively weakened even the most powerful chiefs of the south, who, under the British, had far more autonomy than their northern counterparts. In particular, *The Chiefs (Recognition) Act* ensured:

"...absolute subservience of chiefs [as it] empowered the Minister to withdraw recognition of chiefs; direct any chief to refrain from the exercise of his functions; and even prevent the chief from residing in a specific area, if need be"⁵.

Needless to say the acephalous groups of northern Ghana, which did not have chiefs and had been looking forward to taking off the colonial yoke they had been forced to wear, welcomed the push to eliminate the chieftaincy institution and/or make it politically irrelevant in national affairs. Nkrumah's actions were tacitly welcomed among them. For this reason, they neither called for their traditional independence nor agitated against their subjugation to other ethnic groups.

After the overthrow of the CPP government in 1966, however, a process of restoring the chieftaincy to its pre-independence stature was initiated, as the military-run National Liberation Council found its strongest support

among some of the chiefs in the south that the CPP government had politically emasculated. The Busia regime that took over power from the NLC in 1969 continued the process of restoring the chieftaincy institution. This resulted in the promulgation of the Chieftaincy Act of 1971 (Act 370), which fully restored the chieftaincy institution to its pre-independence status.

Although the Act preserved the colonial legacy of making chiefs strong enough to maintain a stronghold on the masses of the people within the limits of the law and yet weak enough to be no source of threat to the operations of the central government, the reinstated chiefs were happy to be back. But that come back evoked feelings of unease among the acephalous groups in northern Ghana. This is because rather than taking a brave and hard look at the historical inequities of the chieftaincy institution in that part of the country in order to make it more inclusive and democratic in its structures and practices, the new chieftaincy act preserved the claims of suzerainty and the rights and privileges of the structured and politically prominent chiefships to the neglect of the acephalous ones. Hence, in the case of the Northern Region, the act simply glossed over the historical unease between the Konkombas and Dagombas in particular, and the other ethnic groups that were subjugated to the rule of the prominent ones during the colonial rule.

The Act also set up the National House of Chiefs, empowering it to adjudicate as an original and an appellate court in all chieftaincy matters, including chieftaincy succession disputes and interethnic claims of suzerainty. The Regional Houses of Chiefs also had similar powers. This in effect meant that all groups laying claims to new chiefships would have to submit their requests to the existing chiefs under whom the claimants were subjected by the colonial arrangements. The law empowered the recognized paramount chiefs to vet and recommend all applications for paramouncy to the Regional and/or National Houses of Chiefs for approval. The paramount chiefs also had absolute discretion in the creation and/or elevation of lesser chiefs to the status of Divisional Chiefs within their Traditional Councils. Government recognition through gazetting was not possible unless such prior processes had been followed.

In June of 1979, Flt. Lt. J. J Rawlings launched a revolution whose battle cry was "power to the people," and its hallmark, the conscious and systematic undermining of established authority. Although the revolution targeted military rulers, its tenets soon became applicable in other areas, leading once more to the erosion of the power base of chiefs. In September 1979, an elected government under Hilla Limann took over power from the AFRC under a constitution that guaranteed the existence of the chieftaincy institution under Article 177 (1), which stated, *inter alia*, that "the institution

of chieftancy together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage is hereby guaranteed"⁶. Within the space of the 27 months that it was in power, the Limann administration witnessed two major ethnic wars before J.J Rawlings overthrew it in December 1981.

The revolutionary fervence of the cadres that came with the coup intensified again the disrespect and undermining of chiefs. In the course of the 19 years of rule that followed (11 as PNDC and 8 as civilianized National Democratic Congress), J.J Rawlings is known to have openly questioned the authority of chiefs through his acts and utterances. He introduced the People's Defence Committees (PDCs) in the villages and towns and the Worker's Defence Committees (WDCs) in work places as the revolutionary organs charged with wresting power from established structures and systems to further the interests of the revolution⁷. The populist revolutionary tactics and threats of revolutionary action against any resistor successfully cowed many power holders, including chiefs. As in the case of the Nkrumah era, the subordination of chiefs to the thumb of the ruling government played to the interests of groups that saw the chief as the embodiment of their subjugation to colonial institutions that the established system imposed on them. Consequently, the "power to the people" slogans of the revolution gave courage to those groups that did not favor the chieftancy institution to openly challenge its legitimacy and authority. As Boafo- Arthur, Kwame (2001) notes:

Reminiscent of the CPP era where the party chiefs at various levels wielded a lot of influence and rivaled the chief, the early revolutionary years equally witnessed the erosion of the powers of some chiefs as PDC members arrogated to themselves the judiciary powers formerly enjoyed by the chiefs.

In other words, the chieftancy institution had lost its power and glories, and there was no reason for any one to want to fight to have it.

Although Rawlings turned tails in 1983 to court the support of the chiefs for his endangered revolution, subsequent acts and remarks showed he was not exactly repentant. For instance, on the 22 nd of March 1985, the Provisional National Defence Council Law 107 (PNDCL 107) was promulgated to amend Section 48 (2) of the 1971 Chieftancy Act. That amendment re-vested in government, the right to recognize or withdraw recognition from a chief. This was a 360-degree return to the Nkrumah era in which this recognition clause was used to cow chiefs into line with government policies. In the case of the Konkomba-Dagomba wars, however, the greatest impact of the PNDC era lay in the actions and utterances of its leader, J. J. Rawlings. For instance with reference to the

resistance of the Dagombas to grant the Konkombas a paramountcy, Rawlings is known to have publicly stated that "no one brought land to this earth". Some Dagomba opinion leaders have held up this statement as a direct encouragement to the Konkombas, which emboldened them to prepare for, and execute the Guinea Fowl War of 1994. The government also used the opportunity of creating new districts in 1988 to decouple Saboba, the traditional headquarters of the Konkombas from Yendi by making it the capital of the new Saboba-Chereponi District. The creation of the Saboba-Chereponi district was fraught with challenges about which villages should or should not be carved out of the Yendi district into the new ones. As will be seen later, the challenges had connotations for land ownership.

Despite his personal beliefs, utterances and actions with respect to the chieftaincy institution, Rawlings seemed to have been unable to influence the crafters of the 1992 Constitution, even though he tightly managed the process to ensure the indemnity of the PNDC members from prosecution after the return to constitutional rule. Hence, the 1992 Constitution restored the chieftaincy institution to its 1971 status by abrogating the clause on recognition of chiefs by government that PNDCL 107 (re)instituted. Article 270 (Chapter 22) of the 1992 Constitution specifically states that:

- 1) The institution of chieftaincy, together with its traditional councils as established by customary law and usage, is hereby guaranteed.
- 2) Parliament shall have no power to enact any law which
 - (a) confers on any person or authority the right to accord or withdraw recognition to or from a chief for any purpose whatsoever; or
 - (b) in any way detracts or derogates from the honour and dignity of the institution of chieftaincy.

But the import of the 1992 Constitution on the eruption of the Guinea Fowl War lies in the provisions of Article 274 of the Constitution, which gives the Regional House of Chief absolute control over chieftaincy affairs in the region of origin. Section 3 of the article empowers the Regional Houses of Chiefs as follows:

- 3) A Regional House of Chiefs shall —
 - (a) perform such functions as may be conferred upon it by or under an Act of Parliament;
 - (b) advise any person or authority charged under this Constitution or any other law with any responsibility for any matter relating to or affecting chieftaincy in the region;

- (c) hear and determine appeals from the traditional councils within the region in respect of the nomination, election, selection, installation or deposition of a person as a chief;
 - (d) have original jurisdiction in all matters relating to a paramount stool or skin or the occupant of a paramount stool or skin, including a queenmother to a paramount stool or skin;
 - (e) undertake a study and make such general recommendations as are appropriate for the resolution or expeditious disposition of chieftaincy disputes in the region;
 - (f) undertake the compilation of the customary laws and lines of succession applicable to each stool or skin in the region.
- 4) The original and appellate jurisdiction of a Regional House of Chiefs shall be exercised by a Judicial Committee of the Regional House of Chiefs consisting of three chiefs appointed by the Regional House of Chiefs from among its members.

Taken together, this article had the following implications for the acephalous traditions in the Northern Region:

1. The reformation of the chieftaincy institution was left in the hands of existing chiefs themselves. Therefore it was difficult to imagine how existing chiefs would make changes that were inimical to their positions and interests.
2. The decisions to create any new chiefships was also in the hands of the incumbent chiefs, not governments. This explains why when the Konkombas submitted their request for a paramountcy to the government, they were asked to return it to the Ya-Na for his consideration, since under the law, he had the right to create chiefships.
3. Since the Regional House of Chiefs which had original and appellate jurisdiction in these matters (Clause 4 above) was composed of the chiefs of the four ethnic groups whose rule the acephalous traditions were taking issue with, the avenues for a peaceful and successful prosecution of a course of change were technically blocked by this, if the supervising chief was not supportive of the request.

The foregoing, in effect, restored and legitimized the subjugation of the acephalous groups to the cephalous ones. The acephalous groups, which had hoped to extricate themselves from the colonial yoke, found themselves once more in the bind. It also meant that the paramount chiefs of the four

ethnic groups (Dagomba, Mamprusi, Nanumba and Gonja) now had the absolute discretion on whether or not they would create divisional chiefs among the 13 other ethnic groups or recommend the elevation of any of the 13 groups to the status of paramountcy.

The fears of the 13 non-chiefly ethnic groups that they would never be granted their traditional independence under these legal arrangements became manifest when the Ya-Na, Paramount Chief of the Dagombas rejected their application for paramountcy in 1993 on the grounds that "...the demand for traditional authority based on numerical strength had no justification and that their claim, no doubt, had questionable underpinnings"⁸. Once the application was rejected by the Ya-Na, all avenues for pursuing their request were blocked, since it was only the Ya-Na who could have passed on their application to the National House of Chiefs.

The Konkombas' recourse to arms "to fight for their traditional independence"⁹ was therefore precipitated by this perceived lack of head way in their negotiations with the Dagombas on the issue of paramountcy. They noted that the situation in the Northern Region where only four paramount chiefs were allowed was inconsistent with the operations of the chieftaincy institution in other parts of the country. As their youth leaders noted: "...the Volta Region is about a quarter of the size of Northern Region [and yet it has] 20 paramount chiefs, and 20 traditional councils". Similarly, they argued, "[I]n Ashanti where they speak the same language and have almost the same culture there are over 30 paramountcies apart from the Asanteman Council."¹⁰

Against this background, the refusal of the Ya-Na in 1993 to recommend the creation of a paramountcy for the Konkombas was perceived as an attempt to perpetuate the subjugation of the Konkombas to the Dagombas. But the Konkombas were not alone in recognizing this when they stated that, "[T]he cry of tribes who had been denied traditional independence in the country is so loud and clear that it has rendered Ghana's independence from the British in 1957 meaningless to them"¹¹. Other ethnic groups such as the Nchumburus, Nawuris, Bassares etc watched the Konkomba-Dagomba saga with keen interest. On the other side, the Gonjas, Nanumbas and Mamprusis also watched the political game with equal interest, as they feared that their subordinate ethnic groups might follow the example of the Konkombas in attempting to extricate themselves from their over lordship. Already, the Gonjas had tasted the bitter pill when the Mos outwitted them and successfully claimed their traditional independence just before the 1992 Constitution came into being.

The success of the Mos exposed the stifling effects the provisions of the 1992 Constitution has on the evolution of the chieftaincy institution in northern Ghana, and the impact this has had on bringing to light the inequities that underscore the interethnic conflicts between the Konkombas and Dagombas in particular, and in general between the chiefly groups and the non-chiefly ones. Numbering only 55,174 people nationwide and only 5,178 in the northern region, the Mos constitute only 0.3% of the regions population, compared to the Konkombas who account for 16.9%. And yet they currently have a paramount chief of their own who sits on equal footing with the paramount chiefs of the Dagombas, Gonjas, Mamprusis, and Nanumbas in the Northern Regional House of Chiefs. They were able to achieve this because of their ability to slip their request for paramountcy through pre-constitutional channels before the latter came into force. According Dr. Mensah, a Mo, during the discussions leading up to the formulation of the 1992 constitution, his ethnic group foresaw the import of the upcoming constitution. As such they moved quickly to appeal to the PNDC government, through the National House of Chiefs, for the creation of a paramountcy out of the existing Gonja Traditional Area. The National House of Chiefs approved their application and the government obliged and gave them the paramountcy before the coming into force of the 1992 Constitution.

The inability of the Konkombas, a more populous ethnic group, to achieve the same aim only one year after the Mos underscored the futility of trying to use the Regional Houses of Chiefs as instruments of change for them after the Constitution came into force. This frustration sparked a security dilemma that set the stage for the building of military alliances on both sides which led to the unprecedented scale and intensity of fighting in the 1994/95 conflicts. As the chiefs and their respective ethnic groups banded together to defend their rights, so did the non-chiefly groups build alliances to force change. If Konkombas led the war, it might as well have been because of their numerical strength in relation to the other acephalous groups. The desire to force change was equally strong among all the non-chiefly ethnic groups.

1.2 Land ownership, citizenship and interethnic exclusion

1.2.1 Historical claims and the politics of misinformation

The relationship between chieftaincy, land ownership and the issues of inter-ethnic exclusion present another labyrinth of causes and events that have underscored all the ethnic wars in northern Ghana. Traditionally,

ethnic claims to land in Northern Ghana is established through three main sources:

a) Prior settlement – All the ethnic groups in Northern Ghana base their claims of origin, indigeneity and ownership of land on the principle of prior settlement. Under this procedure, any group that is first to move into an unclaimed space assumed the right of ownership of the said land. Later settlers generally acknowledged the boundaries and accorded the prior settlers that right of ownership, including the right to adjudicate on matters relating to the land.¹²

b) Conquest: - In many cases, the right to land was also acquired through military conquest. In this case, a militarily superior group of latecomers might fight and conquer the prior settlers and thereby annex the right of ownership of such lands. In such cases:

...conquest seems to set a baseline in cultural time for indigenes. The incoming conquerors usually attain a higher status position from that point on, which means that earlier inhabitants, or more indigenous ones, have lower status¹³

But the degree to which acquisition by conquest can be held to be a permanent and irrevocable fact depends to a large extent on the ability of the 'conquerors' to assert and maintain their authority over the 'conquered'¹⁴. This raises the question of balance of power between the conquerors and the conquered; and a relevant factor in the relationship between the Konkombas and Dagombas.

c) Freehold arrangements: it was also common for the owner of a piece of land (first settlers) to give portions of it to family members, friends or even unrelated new arrivals for agricultural, construction and other related economic purposes. In such cases, the recipient became the new owner of the land and had the right to pass it on to other people by donation, largely¹⁵. This rule becomes important in other interethnic relationships, such as the one between the Konkombas and Nanumbas, for instance.

These rules of land acquisition in northern Ghana are at the center of the land-related disputes in the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts. Under rule 1, the oral histories of both the Dagombas and Konkombas accept that the Konkombas were living in Yendi before the Dagombas moved in. This story is clearly retold in the Dagomba drum history, which is the official Dagbon¹⁶ account of their movement into the area. The oral history of the Gonjas also support the fact that they drove the Dagombas out of their base in Yendi-

Dabari, near Kumbungu in the west and pushed them into Chare, which is known today as Yendi. Recorded history strongly corroborates these oral traditions. For instance, Ştaniland (1975:5), relying on the authority of much earlier writers, states that the settlement of the Dagombas in the Yendi area:

"...may have occurred in the seventeenth century when the capital was moved towards present-day Yendi. The Dagomba pushed back the Konkomba and established divisional chiefs among them"¹⁷.

In fact, Froelich (1954:33) quoting Tamakloe (1931) states that "in order to escape the threat of Gonjas, Na. Luro in 1554-1570 constructed a new capital at Yendi in Konkomba Territory, at a place called Tchare, and expelled the Konkomba who were there. These founded the town of Wangbun on the route to Demon."¹⁸ More recently, respondents in M. D. Iddi's research on the chieftaincy in Dagbon (1973-74) consistently mentioned the Konkombas as one of the ethnic groups the Dagombas met when they moved into the Yendi area.¹⁹

Despite these documented acknowledgement of the sequence of settlements, contemporary Dagomba opinion leaders have advanced the argument that the Konkombas are aliens who migrated into Ghana from Togo and, therefore, do not have any rights to land in Ghana. For instance, in his contribution to the parliamentary debate on the 1994/95 war, B A Fuseini, the Member of Parliament for Gukpegu- Sabonjida at the time, who also doubled as the Regional Minister of the Northern Region, said "*the Konkomba tribe is not an indigenous tribe in Ghana but Togo and therefore gets support from Togo anytime there are such conflicts.*"²⁰

Several writers picked up and gave legitimacy to that argument in their descriptions of the causes of the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts in general, and the 1994 war in particular. For instance, Abayie Boaten (1999) attributes the cause of the war to the fact that the Konkombas are settlers, migrants or aliens who are not playing by the rules of accepting the authority of their hosts – the Dagombas. He asserts that:

The wild Konkomba who lived in villages were supposed to pay allegiance to the Ya-Na and the Dagomba sub-chiefs who were the original owners of the land. Though the Konkomba have lived among the Dagomba for a long time, the latter had never regarded them as owners of the land". [He asserts further that] "the Konkomba who lived in the Togo (French) territory made a safe haven of the Gold Coast, whenever they committed an offence in Togo. Therefore the Konkomba of Ghana and their compatriots from Togo who were regarded as criminals and landless had lived in Ghana unhindered."²¹

Horowitz (2001:413) repeated the view that:

"Konkomba, originally migrants from Togo are landless laborers who work in a clientage relationship, contributing crops and services to their Nanumba, Gonja, and Dagomba hosts. Controlled by their hosts' traditional authorities, Konkomba began to demand their own chieftaincy."²²

Martinson, H. B also sought to demolish the Konkombas' claim to indigeneity by trying to debunk historical accounts presented by Tait and other writers. But the thrust of his argument is that this war is just another one of a series of wars of retribution for historical events that have very remote, if any, significance today. He argues that:

It is intellectually pathetic, and historically myopic, for, many Ghanaians have either failed to recognize, or are ignorantly not aware that, Konkombas, ever since: (1914, 1917, 1940, 1946, 1981, and Feb. 1994) have fought and are still fighting the people of Dagbon (Dagombas) for no reason, either (sic) than the mythical assumption that their ancestors were exterminated by NAA NYAGSE. So the lands of Dagbon belong to them and should be annexed to that of Nanun, Gonja and Mamprusi²³.

The foregoing arguments have sought to cast the Konkomba-Dagomba wars as wars of insubordination of a rebellious migrant group against the legitimate authority of their benevolent hosts. Accordingly, the Dagombas are portrayed as victims of their own generosity, and the Konkombas as ungrateful aggressors. What seems to have deepened the collective hurt and resolve of the Konkombas to persist in their demands is the questionable accuracy of the facts on which the migrant theory is founded. Available evidence suggests that the migrant argument is fraught with errors of fact and logic on several counts. First of all, the argument presumes that the territorial carvings that we now call Ghana and Togo predated the existence of the various ethnic groups in the parts of the expanse of land that now belong to two different countries. This obviously is an error of fact. As noted above, the written and oral histories of both the Dagombas and Konkombas agree that the two ethnic groups coexisted in the said space long before the advent of colonialism, which carved out the land into what is now two separate countries. On the contrary, the division of that space into what we know today as Ghana and Togo did not take place until late in the 19th century, that is, two centuries after the two ethnic groups had coexisted in the same space.

Ironically, the same accident of history split the Dagombas, alongside the Konkombas, Nanumbas, Nawuris, Bassares, Nchumburus and parts of the State of Mamprugu between the two countries – German Togo and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Protectorate, now part of what is known today as Ghana. As Staniland recollects:

The partition of Dagomba kingdom was formalised on 14 th November 1899 by the signing of a convention concerned with 'the settlement of the Samoan and other questions'. ...[after which] the British then created, by Order-in-Council, the Protectorate of the Northern Territories, the boundaries of which recognised local geography or social organisation only to the extent of following the line of a river, the Black Volta, along part of its southern border (Staniland 1975:41)²⁴

Hence, from 1899 to 1919, most of the eastern part of the current Northern Region including Yendi, the seat of the Paramount Chief of Dagbon, as well as Saboba- Chereponi, occupied by the Konkombas and other groups, were part of Togoland and under German rule. As Staniland notes, the Milner-Simon Agreement signed between the British and the French in 1919 set the boundaries for the mandated areas in Togo. When the League of Nations finally ratified the agreement three years later, it officially gave:

"Britain a mandate area of 13, 000 square miles, of which 10,597 square miles lay in the 'Northern Sector', including the ex-German parts of Dagomba and Mamprusi". Subsequently, the "British Government, by an Order-in-Council of 11 October 1923, ... proclaimed that the Northern Section of British Togoland should be 'administered as if it formed part of the Protectorate' of the Northern Territories. The ex-German section thereafter became the "Eastern Dagomba District", administered as part of the N.T by a D.C responsible to the Chief Commissioner at Tamale." (Staniland Pg 72)

Technically, therefore, more than half of what is known today as Dagombaland was originally part of the Togo when that country was created. It only became part of Ghana at independence. The questions that have not been answered to date in the analysis of the Konkomba-Dagomba wars are: If the Konkombas were carved into Togo alongside many other ethnic groups, why then are they being selectively targeted with the migrant argument. Why is the same argument not used in the western portion of the northern region which has several ethnic groups divided between Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Why aren't other groups in other regions using the same arguments against the more than 20 other ethnic groups that have similar splits across borders.

The migrant argument also ignores the fact that among the agrarian ethnic groups in the north, shifting cultivation was the preferred agro-ecological land management practice. Therefore, in situations where land availability was not a problem (as is the case in the Northern Region), this land management practice took the form of frequent movement of groups into empty spaces. It was a norm rather than an exception; and the only boundaries that defined the limits of movements were the natural boundaries of rivers and hills or the prior claims of ownership of a piece of land by families, clans and other indigenous ethnic groups. Jack Goody highlights the fallacy inherent in the use of the colonial and postcolonial boundaries as the basis for determining indigeneity of the ethnic groups in northern Ghana when he points out that:

migration has been defined as 'the physical transition of an individual or a group from one society to another'...this definition tends to assume what is now largely true, the division of the entire world into boundary-maintaining nation states.... But to encompass earlier migrations, particularly those in stateless societies, we need to take account of movement of people into empty unclaimed lands into the interstices between existing social groups²⁵.

Finally, the oral and written histories of both the Konkombas and Dagombas betray an inherent contradiction in the migrant theory. Part of the oral history of the creation of Dagbon suggests that the Dagombas conquered the Konkombas when they moved into the eastern part of the northern region. While acknowledging the encounter, the Konkombas on the other hand have vehemently and consistently counterclaimed that they were never defeated in battle against the Dagombas. They insist that they voluntarily moved away from the Dagombas when they arrived. Tait (1961:4) quotes a Konkomba elder as saying:

When we grew up and reached our fathers they told us they (our forefathers) stayed in Yaa [Yendi]. The Kabre and the Bekwom were here. The Dagomba were in Tamale and Kumbungu. The Dagomba rose and mounted their horses. We saw the horses, that is why we rose up and gave the land to the Dagomba. We rose up and got here with the Bekwom. The Bekwom rose up and went "across the River. We go, rising up to go "across the River..."

By the rules of land acquisition laid out above, had the Konkombas been the secondary arrivals on the land, why was it necessary for the Dagombas to fight and conquer them, since the operations of rule 1 on land acquisition would have resolved the ownership question without recourse to arms.²⁶

In support of their claims of indigeneity, the Konkombas have pointed out that the Dagombas symbolically refer to them as their "mothers." According to them, this practice is founded on the belief that to accede to the highest chiefship among the Dagombas, i.e. the Ya-Na, Paramount Chief of the Dagombas, one must have Konkomba blood in him. In other words, one's mother or grandmother must have come from the Konkomba ethnic group. This, they argue, is because the installation rituals for the Ya-Na contain significant portions of Konkomba rituals and practices inherited at the time the Dagombas moved into Chare or present day Yendi. Both the Dagombas and Konkombas accept this myth, and Dagomba history and customs attest to this appellation and place of honour accorded to Konkombas in Dagomba customs. But to substantiate this tradition, the Konkombas have also pointed to the fact that the wives of the Ya-Na traditionally dress without blouses, and always wear their hair lowly cut. This they claim is a typical Konkomba practice that has been institutionalized by Konkomba women within the household of the highest chief of Dagbon²⁷. Konkombas have also pointed to the fact that a meeting of Dagomba chiefs in 1930 documented that "the inhabitants of this state do not form one homogenous people, but a collection of tribes, invading Dagomba and Chakosi, and the original Konkomba..."²⁸

The foregoing accounts make it hard to sustain the argument that the Konkombas migrated into the eastern part of the Northern Region after the arrival of the Dagombas. The question that remains unanswered is why no one, including the state, has intervened to mediate the resolution of the disagreements based on the evidence available. For answers, we turn to an examination of the uncertain state policies that may have created the conditions for the interethnic competitions in the first place.

1.2.2 State policies and the intensification of interethnic entitlements to land

The series of events that triggered all the Konkomba-Dagomba wars since 1914 have their immediate and remote causes rooted in the acts and omissions of the colonial and postcolonial governments on the land ownership question in Northern Ghana. As a matter of fact, state policies since the colonial era have complicated the land ownership question between the Konkombas and Dagombas. There are two distinct acts with different scenes in this play-out.

Act I began with the promulgation of the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of 1927 (as amended in 1931), which vested the "management, control and administration of native lands" in the Northern Territories in the Governor (Konings: 1986 Pg 156)²⁹. This Ordinance and its subsequent amended

versions were never reversed even after independence. Hence, the Administration of Lands Act 1962 Act 123, the State Land Act, 1962 Act 125; The Public Conveying Act, 1965; and the Conveyance Decree, 1973 NRC 145 all upheld the basic tenets of the 1927 Ordinance with respect to the ownership and/or management of lands in the three northern regions.³⁰ Even though Article 18 (1) of the 1969 Constitution guaranteed that "no property of any description shall be compulsorily taken possession of, and no interest in or right over property of any description shall be compulsorily acquired by the State..."; and despite the fact that Article 164 (1) of the same constitution required that "all stool lands in Ghana shall be vested in the appropriate Stool on behalf of, and in trust for, the subjects of the Stool", lands in the three northern regions remained vested in the state. This is because the 1927 Ordinance and the subsequent legislation ensuing from it remained in the statute books.

The unintended consequence of this state policy was that by placing all lands in the public domain, interethnic claims to it were muffled, as the various groups had no legal basis to indulge in any claims and counterclaims. But the real reason why land issues were never the subjects of interethnic conflicts from the colonial times till the late 1970s was that the 1927 Ordinance and the subsequent laws on land ownership had virtually no practical effect on the traditional landownership practices, especially among the chiefless societies. At best the government laws were a mere superimposition of 'foreign' land laws for the sole purpose of allowing the central government to appropriate land without having to pay compensation for them. Even that right was challenged in some cases (Morton, M 1997:9). In practice, therefore, the indigenous concepts of land, its ownership and tenure rights were hardly affected by government policy. Indeed, the colonial and post colonial land laws tried in different ways to preserve the traditional systems of land ownership and management. For instance, despite the existence of these statute laws, in the matter of land tenure, customary law remained the *de facto* basis of adjudicating on matters of land in the state courts. This practice derived from the order of precedence established under the rules of interpretation of the Interpretation Act, 1960. As Kwamena Bentsi-Enchill (1964:37) clarifies:

"A principal fact which may be seen to emerge from rules 1 and 2 [of the Interpretation Act] is that as the overwhelming bulk of the citizens of Ghana are persons subject to "customary law", and as the bulk of the land is held under customary tenure... a major proportion of the transactions (and of issues arising out of them) is governed by the indigenous law."³¹

And since the indigenous laws among the Konkombas and Dagombas alike vested the ownership of lands in heads of families serving as trustees only, interethnic competition for land was virtually non-existent. This is probably the single most important reason why the incidence of land-related interethnic conflicts were kept in check during this period. As the Konkomba Youth Association noted, during this period:

...all lands were vested in the state and individuals exercised control over pieces of land they controlled. The skins were treated just the same as individuals and therefore, did not matter when it comes to land acquisitions.³²

In other words, in the eyes of the Konkombas and other ethnic groups, the period between 1927 and 1978 created a level playing field for all ethnic groups on matters of land ownership. This was because if any ethnic group in the north tried to appropriate land to the exclusion of others, the Government could, in principle, easily invoke its title to the lands and remove such objects of contest from the hands of the claimants.

Act 2 started in the late 1970s. The military government of General I. K Acheampong had come under intense pressure from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to return the country to constitutional rule. By 1977, the pressure on the Supreme Military Council (SMC) was so strong that the Government proposed the Union Government concept that would allow the military government to civilianize itself into a one party government, to avoid the public pressure for a return to a multiparty democracy. Since the proposal was to be subjected to a national referendum, the SMC badly needed a "Yes" vote from the predominantly rural north to counter the anticipated "No" vote from the urban south, which had witnessed more intense activity from the CSOs. This set the grounds for dealing making. A group of northern politicians and "...enlightened Northern Chiefs and intellectuals..."³³ promised to deliver a bloc "Yes" vote from the north. In return, the Government would repeal the Legislative Instruments 87 and 109 of 1963 with respect to the Northern lands, the latest legislation at the time that emanated from the 1927 Ordinance. The natural question that came up was – to whom should the lands be returned, since they were not taken away from any identifiable groups in the first instance.

To answer that question, the SMC government set up *the Committee on Ownership of Land and Positions of Tenants in Northern and Upper Regions* (commonly referred to as the I. R Alhassan Committee) in 1978. The Konkombas, like all other ethnic groups in the north, submitted a memorandum to the Committee to stake their claim to the ownership of land, which, they believed, should be accorded to them. Despite the

evidence they adduced before the Committee, as well as, the oral and written histories of both ethnic groups, the Konkombas lost their claims before the Committee on the grounds that:

"the land the Konkombas now claim should be vested in them is under the Ya Na by conquest but is currently predominantly inhabited by the Konkombas, thus their demand for lesser area than they say they once possessed. We therefore accept the claim of the Dagombas that the area claimed by the Konkombas is Dagomba land."³⁴

Why such unambiguous evidence could be ignored in the decisions of the Committee can only become clearer in subsequent sections of this paper. For now, suffice it to say that this decision effectively denied Konkombas title to, and ownership of any piece of land in the Northern Region. As will be demonstrated shortly, the deliberations, decisions and recommendations of the I.R Alhassan Committee became an important defining moment for the articulation and mobilization of a pan- Konkomba militancy that snowballed into the Guinea Fowl War of 1994/95.

But the questions that have skipped writers on the Konkomba-Dagomba wars to date are: why has this body of mutually reinforcing oral and written evidence been under- played in the literature on the Konkomba-Dagomba wars to date? Why are there such conscious efforts on the part of some groups to selectively present and/or interpret history in order to exclude others from the ownership of land? Do these moves emanate from and/or represent pan-ethnic agendas or are they the machinations of a few self-interested individuals. Who is involved in these reconstructions of historical realities.

PART 2: ANCIENT HISTORIES, MODERN ACTORS: THE REINVENTION OF MYTHS, ETHNIC SYMBOLS AND THE POLITICISATION OF CONFLICTS

2.1 Ethnic Elites and the Perpetuation of the Konkomba Dagomba conflicts

Based on a thorough survey of the theories on ethnic wars, Stuart J. Kaufman concludes that: "[T]he necessary preconditions for ethnic war are ethnic myths and fears and the opportunity to act on them politically [which come]...when the politics of ethnic symbolism goe to extremes, provoking hostile actions and leading to a security dilemma"³⁵. According to him, the processes that lead to this may either be mass-led or elite-led. In the case of elite-led conflicts, he argues that:

"Ethnic symbols are tools used by manipulative elites, but they only work when there is some real or perceived conflict of interest at work and mythically based feelings of hostility that can be tapped using ethnic symbols. All three elements are needed to make mobilization happen: Without perceived conflicts of interest, people have no reason to mobilize. Without emotional commitment based on hostile feelings, they lack sufficient impetus to do so. And without leadership, they typically lack the organisation to act"³⁶

While Stuart's concept of symbolic politics provides a powerful framework for understanding the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts, some clarification is required to help us grasp the intricacies of these conflicts. First, it is not clear from Stuart's account whether the factors of *perceived conflicts of interest*, *emotional commitment* and *elite leadership* are coequal in their causation of the outbreak of violence or there is a cause-effect relationship between them. In other words, do they have to occur sequentially or simultaneously. If sequentially, which one has to come first, and does the occurrence of one lead, directly or indirectly, to the occurrence of the other? These clarifications are essential in the context of the Konkomba-Dagomba wars because perceived conflicts of collective interests is only possible when personal interests are canalised into collective interests that are capable of spurring collective action. This is important in our understanding of the causes of the Konkomba-Dagomba wars because Konkombas are known to be very individualistic in their everyday life. They are spread across large parts of the Northern Region and beyond, often live in remote, inaccessible areas. Since they do not have a single apical head, and have no access to modern communication technologies, individual interests would not necessarily aggregate into collective interests unless someone actively collates and synthesizes the individual interests into collective ones. Even if all the people by some coincidence seem to be thinking alike, someone has to articulate and channelize them into a collective interest that can illicit commitment from the individuals. In other words, it requires leadership to collate and channelize individual interests into collective ones. For the same reason, conflict of interests may not be perceived until someone creates and/or raises consciousness of structural and systemic injustices, or mutually exclusive interests of two or more parties that are otherwise imperceptible to the mass of the people. In other words, people may be living in blissful ignorance of their inequalities and/or interests until someone comes along and points out the dangers or interests at stake. For instance, in the 1994 ethnic conflict, the Dagombas and their allies accused the Christian Churches, particularly the Catholic Church, for bringing education to the Konkombas, and "...civilising the Konkombas or rather

opening their eyes...”, which enabled them to read their history and to challenge the authority of the Dagombas and their allies³⁷. *The Statesman*, a weekly newspaper, also reports that “the Catholic Church in Yendi was completely destroyed and vehicles burnt. Reasons: educating Konkombas.”³⁸

Collective emotional commitment to a common cause must be mobilized and organised. Otherwise individual emotions can at best lead to mob action, not strategically and tactically planned ethnic wars, as we have witnessed in the case of the Konkomba-Dagomba wars. In brief, conflict of interests, as well as, emotional commitment to group causes can and are usually socially constructed through careful articulation and mobilization of the people to the constructed common view. But as Stuart reminds us, the mobilization of individual perceptions of interests and commitment to action does not necessarily mean that the purposes for which such mobilization is undertaken is for the common good. As he notes:

...more than a means of appealing to interests, ethnic symbols are a tool for elites to use in mobilizing ethnic groups, especially their own, in pursuit of policies the elites prefer, but for reasons only partially explained by the tangible interests ostensibly at stake³⁹

It is within this framework that we must now examine the role of various actors in the reinvention and/or reinterpretation of the historical myths that have perpetuated the Konkomba-Dagomba wars. Central to this analysis is the role of ethnic elite (comprising individuals, the leadership of ethnic youth associations (EYAs), and political leaders of both ethnic groups) on the one hand, and national level political actors who may not be members of the feuding ethnic groups. The guiding question here is what interests do these individuals or groups of actors have in the generation and/or perpetuation of the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts.

2.1.1 The commodification of land and the new struggle for resource control

Since the deregulation of land ownership in northern Ghana, the commodification of land in the northern sector has been on the increase. Traditionally, both Dagombas and Konkombas believe that land should not be sold because it does not belong to those in possession of it now; it belongs to the dead, the living and the unborn. Contrary to this believe, land has increasingly become a commodity of every day trade through leases to non-indigenes for housing and other commercial developments. This trend

has been on the increase in the urban areas, in particular, where leases and rents have soared due to increase in demand.

Even though technically chiefs in northern Ghana do not own land, chiefs of the ruling ethnic groups have increasingly asserted ownership of all lands within their purview. This is because land has become an important source of income for them. In general, chiefs derive income from land in one of two ways. They either sell the lands themselves, often without the knowledge of the families who own the land or they derive income from the signing of the leases and indentures of land under their jurisdiction after the families have sold them⁴⁰. Therefore, the greater the physical space one can command, the larger and more assured one's source of income becomes. Since indigeneity and acknowledged sphere of influence of a traditional authority structure are the major basis for claiming ownership of land under customary law, political exclusion becomes a necessary precondition for the exclusion of other claims to land. If it can be proved that you do not belong here, then you have no right to claim any piece of land, unless that has been leased to you. Hence, to deny paramountcy rights to any group is to assure that the land that they would otherwise have claimed to themselves remains the property of the incumbent chiefs.

The signing of releases is a legal process requiring thorough knowledge of the law. And since most chiefs are illiterate, they rely heavily on trusted lawyers to execute the business on their behalf. In many cases, the lawyers claim for themselves parcels of land demarcated for leasing in lieu of legal fees they would otherwise have charged for their services. Over time, the relationships between the lawyers and the client chief gets deeper than a mere business relationship. In many cases, the chiefs come to depend solely on the advice and directions of the lawyer in matters related to the sale of land.

Since these lawyers derive substantial income from the sale of the lands, they develop vested interests in ensuring that their clients maintain and/or expand their entitlements to land.⁴¹ But since land is a fixed commodity, such expansion is only possible when other groups can be excluded from ownership of lands. This fact, according to interviewees, has created a mutual dependency phenomenon which explains why the chieftaincy question has always been closely linked to the land ownership question in the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts. It also explains why some prominent Dagomba lawyers have led the campaigns to deny the Konkombas of land through excluding them from participation in the traditional systems of governance.

Incidentally, interviewees on the Dagomba side have indicated that the commodification of land does not benefit the ordinary people. The proceeds from the sale do not go into any common fund that is applied to communal development projects at the community nor paramountcy levels. The development projects of the local government structures, District and Municipal Assemblies (DMAs), are funded entirely from the Common Fund central government dishes out to them, and/or the meager revenue they raise through various taxes, levies and fees. Chiefs do not make any contributions from the sale of land to the development funds of the DMAs; and there is no evidence that any of such funds have been applied to development projects within the communities. Every cent goes to either the chief and his immediate relatives or to the local officials who assisted in the demarcation and/or sale of the lands: lawyers, some community representatives on the District Assemblies, officials of the surveying companies and/or Lands Commission who demarcate the land into plots, etc. In the process, the ordinary people lose out entirely, and some families have lost their farming land to such sales without any compensation. Conversely, a network of vested interests develops among a clique of educated people and the chiefs who benefit from the sale of lands. The question then is why will the same ordinary people who lose out in these land grab deals be committed to fighting for the land? What interests do they have at stake to warrant their participation in the fight to preserve the title of land for their ethnic group?

On the Konkomba side, land is still communally owned and no individual can sell off family lands to the exclusion of other members. Therefore, personal gain is not an issue beyond the guarantee that one would have land to farm on. But most Konkombas in the past have responded to the need more for land with migration out of their places of origin. This is why Konkombas are found in nearly every part of Ghana that has arable lands. So, if migration can guarantee access to land, why do ordinary Konkombas risk their lives to fight for land that they can have at a minimal cost?

2.1.2 The reinvention of myths and the fetish of ethnic pride

Answers to the questions on how ethnic leaders are able to solicit commitment of their people to the war effort, and why people go to war when they have nothing material to gain from the fighting, lie in the successful reinvention of myths of ethnic identity founded on elusive pride in the glories of the past, which the ethnic leaders can easily commute into personal pride and dignity for the individual. For the Dagombas, for instance, interviewees in this research pointed to the fact that every

Dagomba person walks round with a sense of pride that derives from being a member of the ruling tribe that had a glorious past. That pride translates in daily interethnic interactions into a superiority complex that makes members of every other tribe, especially the non- chiefly ones inferior. Land and chieftaincy are the symbols of that pride and greatness, and the term "grundoo or grungna" is pejoratively used to label all those who do not belong to one or the other of the ruling ethnic groups. It is therefore the highest level of insult for a Dagomba to imagine that a grungna will claim equal status with him or her in any field, especially in the arenas of traditional authority. Their pride of place had already been invaded and threatened by the rise of education among the "grungnas", who by virtue of educational attainments now occupy positions of authority in the civil and public services – positions that give them power and authority over less educated Dagombas. That is already more than they can take. To ask for paramountcy and land is to add insult to injury; it amounts to an invasion of the collective privacy of the ruling ethnic groups. Chieftaincy, and the land that goes with it is their preserve. If war is the answer to keeping the "grungnas" out of chieftaincy and in their place of inferiority, so be it, as long as it preserves the pride of place of the Dagomba. This is the source of the collective commitment of the Dagombas to the war effort of their ethnic group.

Ethnic pride is also the core motivator for Konkomba mobilization to fight. This time, however, it is not the pride of the past that is at issue. Konkombas fight for the right to be respected and treated as equals under the laws of the modern state. They resent the past in which they were collectively treated as inferior. They want to be recognised as a major ethnic group in the region; they want to and (re)claim their status as equals with other tribes in the region and in the country as a whole. If chieftaincy is the route to gaining this equality of place, so be it. They will ask for it; they will fight for it, even though traditionally they have never had a pan ethnic paramount chief.

2.1.3 Media War and the politics of (mis)information

In this struggle for recognition, information is an invaluable instrument for eliciting the commitment and participation of members of one's ethnic group in the war effort. It is also an important weapon for courting and gaining public support and sympathy, which is vital in winning the war through propaganda.

We have noted that both sides have held onto, and used published works of the print media and scholars as supporting evidence of their claims and

counterclaims in the chieftaincy and land disputes. We have tried to capture, up to this point, the inherent contradictions in the various historical accounts that have been used by both sides to justify their positions in the conflict and the recourse to violence as the solution. We have also noted that this is largely because several of the accounts represent deliberate omissions or misrepresentation of historical facts by well-educated people who should know better. The question is, why are they doing this, and who is behind these misrepresentations?

The answers to these questions reside in the fact that while these historical accounts have served the parties in conflict well, the force of currency in arguments of contemporary writers, especially if they are of repute, will not only be an effective tool for propaganda, but a validation of positions the parties hold. In this game plan, ability to marshal intellectual resources that can articulate and argue out the positions of the ethnic group in the law courts or in the courts of public opinion becomes a *sine qua non*. And in this enterprise, it is not the traditional chiefs or elders who are the players, given that most of them are illiterate. Educated ethnic youths play the ball, either in loose associations or in well orchestrated "work gangs" that specialize in various tasks. For instance, the Mos were able to work their way into a paramountcy without a fight because of the massive intellectual resources they brought to bear on the intensive research they needed to argue their case before the National House of Chiefs⁴².

Part of the strategy in this game plan is the ability to co-opt external intellectual resources from the media or academia to strengthen the arsenals of the successful side the media war. In a predominantly illiterate society, what is written or said on radio and television is often taken uncritically by the masses to be the absolute truth. Hence, access to the media and political platforms is a key strategic consideration for the ethnic groups in conflict. Therefore, the ability to build political alliances or court the sympathies of political parties or influential individuals who have access to the print and electronic media becomes a much sought after strategic linkage. For instance, in the play out of the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts, the Dagombas seem to have been winning the "intellectual war" through the use of the press and some academic literature because of their political visibility and greater access to political platforms. A survey of the newspaper reportage at the time of the 1994 conflict shows a much higher carriage of the Dagomba versions of chieftaincy rights and land ownership issues than the Konkomba versions.

The Konkombas were also losing out on the intellectual/media war because of their limited political visibility, nationally. Whatever literature they may have produced by way of memoranda never reached the decision-makers

and/or the press. In cases where they did get through, they were often so filtered as to make the case of the authors incomprehensible to the ordinary mind when it was reported. For example, Dr. Ibn Chambas, the Member of Parliament for Bimbilla and for many years the deputy minister for Foreign Affairs in the PNDC government, is reported to have said in an interview with the Ghanaian Chronicle that he was unaware of any grievances from the Konkombas. To emphasize his surprise at the Konkomba expressions of their grievances in the conflict, he said that "[T]here's not been a single grievance, not one, from them to the government... [adding that] ...I'm here (Parliament) with Konkomba MPs; they're all my friends; they've never told me they have some grievances."⁴³

Incidentally, the Government owned newspaper, the Daily Graphic, claimed about the same time that:

The Konkombas have sent the Castle (seat of Government) and the National House of Chiefs enough memoranda to provide material for a huge bonfire [and] Committees of enquiry have studied the problem and submitted reports on them but the authorities past and present seem to have lacked the courage to act on them [presumably for fear that] any government decision which some ethnic groups find unacceptable may result in the conflict continuing or worsening.⁴⁴

Was Dr. Ibn Chambas denied access to the information on Konkomba grievances. The possibility that some official reports are muffled and/or suppressed was given credence when in an interview with the Ghanaian Chronicle, Mr. Moses Mabengba, Member of Parliament for Saboba (predominantly Konkomba constituency) hinted at the same fact. Asked why the report of the Justice Ampiah Commission that enquired into the Gonja-Nawuri conflict was never revealed, he replied that he did not know, but added that:

"...If a Commission of Enquiry is set up in the first place, its findings must be made public, it may not be tasteful to one party, but the right thing must be done. Whoever is wrong must accept the situation"⁴⁵.

But why such evidence is ignored or muffled in officialdom raises yet more questions about the origins and intents of the perpetrators. It is argued for instance that, in the struggle to win public opinion on their side, the selective use of historical information and/or the manipulation of facts is part of the co-optation strategy designed to veer public opinion onto the side of whoever has prior access to such information. It is also part of the plan to misinform and to co-opt an unsuspecting mass media and academia to give

currency and legitimacy to the deliberate misinformation. This media war is designed to drown out the voices of the politically inconspicuous groups.

This strategy to co-opt the media and academia through deliberate and selective misinformation certainly seems to have worked well for the Dagombas in their conflicts with the Konkombas. As noted above, several authors have bought into, and popularized the migrant and insubordination theories of the Konkomba-Dagomba wars. This is because of the authors' reliance and trust in the versions the Dagombas put out. For instance, Abayie (1999:2) dismisses the claims of the Konkombas that they were the prior settlers in the Yendi area and beyond with an assertion that:

"history among the Konkombas has it that they were the first to occupy the heartland of Dagbon, that is Yendi area. This claim was vehemently rejected by the account of Mr. Geoferey Parker, Acting District Commission, Yendi in 1924"⁴⁶

This assertion was made and held up as proof of the migrant theory in spite of the fact that the official statement the British Government made to the United Nations in 1951 with respect to the situation in the Northern Territories does not support Parker's views. Sub section 27 of that report stated, *inter alia*, that:

The Konkombas are locally believed to have inhabited the whole of the Mamprusi and the northern part of the Dagomba areas of the Trust Territory for as far back as legend relates. They are certainly the earliest immigrants still identifiable and probably also came originally from the Sudan⁴⁷

By ignoring the historical facts, the positions adopted by the media and academia play into the hands of the media warriors who use such misinterpretation of history to fuel their propagandist machinery. The risk is that, rather than providing clarity to why the Konkombas and Dagombas are at war all the times, such uncritical assertions have tended to confound the problem by giving credence to the selected information and reinforcing the exclusion of the unheard parties from access to political authority and/or the ownership of land. Frustrated with the irresponsive nature of the official channels for addressing chieftaincy and land disputes, (i.e. the Regional Houses of Chiefs, as prescribed by the Constitution), the inequitable access to the media and academia drives the unheard factions into desperation.

The fall out is that inequitable access to the media becomes a triggering factor in the escalation of conflicts. In the pre-violence stage, unrepresentative media reportage intensifies frustrations on the part of the faction that has limited access to the media. Under the circumstances, the

push to use force becomes greater as the gun becomes more trusted to speak louder for them than the pen. For instance, the Konkombas in 1994 argued their resolve to fight the Dagombas on the grounds that the misinformation had been taken for the truth in explanations of the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts. And if allowed to stick, they continued, the "Konkombas are migrants" argument essentially excludes them en bloc from citizenship of Ghana and, therefore denies them any claims to ownership of land under rule 1 above – acquisition by prior settlement. In the process, they are reduced en bloc to the status of tenant or settler farmers, who must suffer all the debasing practices associated with this status. They pointed to the fact that the Dagomba Traditional Council had already used the alien argument to deny them any rights to chiefships and to exclude them from political participation in the traditional authority structure at the levels of the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs. They cited the case where the Dagomba Traditional Council, in its response to their formal request for the creation of a paramount chiefship to be occupied by a Konkomba, stated, among others that:

The Konkombas came from Togo and settled on our land. If they no longer want to be part of our establishment, then they have to go back home. They cannot be given any land in Dagbon to establish as second home in addition to their home in Togo.⁴⁸

Under the circumstances, the print media and intellectual community became an unwilling contributor to the escalation of the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts through its uncritical reportage of the stories. Commenting on the policy implications of this unbalanced representation of ethnic positions in the media, Professor Kwesi Yankah of the University of Ghana, Legon, and political satirists who writes for the *Mirror*, a weekly newspaper in Ghana, summed up the issue in the following words:

Interethnic land problems ... appear to be influenced by the biases and noses of townsmen in positions of political influence, men who people say are too known. So that depending on some night oracle, Government position may change.⁴⁹

In the specific case of the 1994 war, he comments that:

Somebody must have dreamed one night that the Togo people these days have no respect for our sovereignty. So any ethnic group up north that straddles the two countries is the people's enemy. Suddenly the objectivity in the state media...has submerged again⁵⁰

He highlights the vilification of the Konkombas in the media when evidence from other sources suggests that all sides to the 1994 conflict were equally barbaric in the atrocities they committed. The effect was the sway of public opinion against the Konkombas. Cornered in this way, it has been argued, the voiceless have no choice but to speak through the might of the gun.

2.1.4 Political incumbency and the annexation of state power

Fighting any war, including ethnic wars, requires the leveraging of political capital in addition to material resources. Hence, within the complex maze of actors in the processes of interethnic exclusion we find pieces of evidence and/or instances of accusations of ethnic infiltration, annexation and usage of public offices and/or state power and resources for ethnic interests. Marginalized ethnic groups have cited several instances where seemingly innocuous national institutional structures, systems, and political processes have been used against them, overtly or covertly. In the particular case of the Northern Region of Ghana, the Konkombas, for instance attributed their loss of land at the hands of the I. R Alhassan Committee to the fact that the membership of the Committee was stacked with ethnic groups hostile to their cause. They point out that the Commissioner of State (Minister) for Lands and Forestry who supervised the setting up of the I. R Alhassan Committee was a Dagomba by birth. In their view, it was not by coincidence that the Chairman of the Committee, I. R. Alhassan was also a Dagomba. Of the twelve (12) members of the Committee, six (6) came from the four ruling ethnic groups in the Northern Region (namely, Gonja, Dagomba, Nanumba and Mamprusi). Two other members of the Committee who hailed from the north were ex-officio members drawn from the Upper Regional House of Chiefs and the Lands Secretariat in that region. The other four members were from the south, and therefore had no intimate knowledge of the history and customary laws on land ownership in the north. In other words, no member of such an important national committee came from any of the 13 non-chiefly ethnic groups in the Northern Region, even though these groups probably had a higher stake in the outcomes of the committee's deliberations than any other group. According to the Konkomba assessment of their loss in the bid to claim land, the representatives of the ruling ethnic groups on the Committee "...were influential in the work of the Committee [which] vested all lands in the Northern Region into the four paramountcies: Dagombas, Gonjas, Mamprusis and Nanumbas [after it] threw overboard the claims of other groups claiming that these groups were all settlers"⁵¹.

A copy of the final report of the Committee, which is available to this researcher shows that five out of the twelve people signed the final report. Incidentally, four out of the five who signed came from the chiefly ethnic groups in the Northern Region. The last signatory was the Regional Lands Officer of the Northern Region, a southerner by origin. Except for one member who had his address in Tamale, all the other members who did not sign came from outside the Northern Region. Could this be proof of the Konkomba allegation that the chiefly tribes had annexed and ethnicized this national exercise to their advantage. Further evidence will be required to establish this. In the meantime, it is enlightening that in the heat of the 1994 conflict, the commander of a Konkomba band of warriors who stopped a passenger vehicle in the middle of the bush and forced the passengers through a lecture on why they, the Konkombas, were fighting, mentioned, among other things, that:

"Mr. Haruna was the Northern Regional Minister during the Limann Regime and he told us that we, konkombas, were a minority tribe...we have no money but they will regret, for it was our colonial masters who divided us and I am 51 years now, having taught as a teacher for 30 years"⁵²

About the same time, in a relatively more cozy but packed conference room more than 600 kilometers away in Accra, the national capital, Mr. Abdulai Fuhlanba, second vice president of the Konkomba Youth Association was giving the same message to press conference in which he cited the Nanumba-Konkomba conflict of 1981, the Gonja-Nawuri conflict of 1991, Gonja-Nawuri clashes of 1992, and the present Konkomba-Dagomba, Gonja, Nanumba conflict as instances of conflicts which had bearings of the ethnic origin of the regional minister at the time of the conflict"⁵³.

At the onset of the 1994 conflict, it was also alleged that: "[T]he Northern Regional Security Committee ... deceived the government into believing that all was calm." As a result, the national security agencies were unable to move in quickly to stem the fighting. Incidentally, it is pointed out, the Regional Minister at the time was the same person who was the Commissioner for Lands and Forestry, who constituted the I. R Alhassan Committee that declared the Konkombas landless.

The foregoing arguments suggest that political office holders of some of the ethnic groups actively use their positions to further the interests of their respective ethnic groups to the exclusion of others. This, in many ways, influences the nature, scale and intensity of the conflicts, as the marginalized groups adopt more violent strategies to force attention to their causes. However, whether such misappropriation of state power and

resources is done with the knowledge and acquiescence of the state has not been established. Nevertheless, the message is that state platforms have often been used to further exclusionary ethnic interests of office holders. But why did the state not sanction such blatant misuse of offices remains to be answered.

PART 3: TRIGGERS OF VIOLENCE

3.1 Dabbling in the unknown: External Political Actors and the escalation of conflicts

3.1.1 Unguarded political statements

Bereft of insights into the history and customs surrounding the political authority structures and land ownership arrangements of the ethnic groups in northern Ghana, many national leaders have tended to take an overly simplistic view of the issues and to act in ways that have exacerbated the conflicts. Preceding sections of this paper have already recapped how national laws, policies and programs relating to chieftaincy rights and land ownership have been insensitive to the peculiarities of non-chiefly ethnic groups in the north as a whole, and in the Northern Region in particular. In addition to these, the actions and/or inactions of certain political leaders in recent times have been cited as major instigators of the security dilemmas that have snowballed into violent clashes. For instance, in December 1991, Flt Lt. Rawlings, then Chairman of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC), the military government he founded after the December 1981 coup d'état, is reported to have said at the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Tamale Secondary School that "no one came to the world with a piece of land, and ... minority tribes would be justified in fighting for the land on which they were hosted by their benevolent land owners."⁵⁴ This was in apparent reference to the persistent denial of land rights to the excluded ethnic groups as a result of the implementation of the outcomes of the 1978 I.R. Alhassan Committee report.

The chiefly ethnic groups in the region, especially the Dagombas have contended that this statement provided an impetus to the bellicose plans of the Konkombas, since that explicit promise of support remains fresh in their minds⁵⁵.

On December 1, 1993, exactly two months to the date of the incident in the Bimbilla market that sparked of the guinea fowl war, Nana Akuoku Sarpong, the Presidential Advisor on Chieftaincy Affairs, gave an address to the Northern Regional House of Chiefs in which he advised the chiefs present

"...to accept changes which evolve out of their own social processes than to force the hand of government into effecting such changes"⁵⁶. He added that "...the President had the constitutional right to elevate chiefs, but that authority would not be exercised capriciously". According to the report, he further stated that:

...the government would not interfere with traditionally agreed arrangements in respect of right to land and its occupancy. He noted that the main forces edging towards destabilizing the peace of the North might not be concerned with land since the various tribes lived for centuries and the arrangements about land occupancy had been observed⁵⁷ "

While his remarks about the remote instigating factors of the conflict were definitely insightful, his statements about the land tenure arrangements were definitely uninformed. He definitely betrayed ignorance of the deep-seated, and long standing disputes on the issue between the ethnic groups. More importantly, his statement that the president had the right to elevate chiefs was completely misleading at best. As a chief, Akuoku Sarpong was definitely aware that Article 270 of the 1992 constitution debarred the President and anybody outside the chieftaincy institution for that matter, from the appointment, elevation, installation and/or recognition of chiefs. So why was he making promises that the Presidency could not deliver. Why was he making this statement at this time. The answer may be found in electoral promises.

3.1.2 Electoral promises

December 1993 marked the first year of the return of Ghana to constitutional rule. The PNDC military government had converted itself into a political party in 1992, contested the elections and won under controversial circumstances, after all the opposition parties boycotted. Prior to the electoral boycott, which came after the presidential elections, political bargaining and horse-trading between contenders and prospective electoral groups was common. It is within this framework that the Statesman reports that: "[A]llegations yet unrefuted abound of the Konkombas being urged on, armed and emboldened by the promises of a paramountcy during the 1992 elections"⁵⁸.

Be it as it may, Rawlings had already proven that he had a soft spot for the non- chiefly groups in the Northern Region. He approved the elevation of the Mos to a paramountcy over the protests of the Gonjas. But that was before the 1992 Constitution came into being. He had shown a similar soft spot for the Konkombas, when his government created the Saboba-

Chereponi district for them amidst protests from the Dagombas. Could he have promised the Konkombas that he would grant them a paramountcy? Further research may be required to answer this question. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to ask whether Akuoku Sarpong's visit to the Northern Regional House of Chiefs in December 1993 was a diplomatic mission intended to persuade the chiefs in that house to open a peaceful pathway for the president to meet his electoral promises. Was his statement that the president had the power to elevate chiefs in spite of the House a veiled attempt to twist the hands of the chiefs into granting what they would otherwise not do?

Again, further research is required to show how the electoral promises and post electoral initiatives of governments could have triggered the 1994 conflict. Such answers might also provide clues to why the Rawlings government, well known for the efficiency of its security apparatus, was unable to act on newspaper reports as far back as October and November 1993 that war drums were beating in the north. Besides, the mob attack on Nana Akuoko Sarpong by an irate group of youths after his speech at the Northern Regional House of Chiefs (referenced above) should have signaled the government to the dangers ahead. Similarly the attack of the Bimbilla Police Station and the seizure of arms from the police by another group of Nanumba youth should have alerted the government to act. Why were these signals ignored? Had the government immobilized itself through political commitments?

3.1.3 The Arms Race

While central government leaders may have been locked into meeting electoral promises, local politicians had similar commitments to meet as well. In all cases, demonstrating apparent and substantive support for their respective ethnic groups was required to guarantee the next electoral victory. As Professor Yankah once more put it, during the parliamentary debate on the conflict, "all [the] MPs had their eyes not necessarily on the truth, but on the 1996 ballot box". Outside parliament, they have to be seen to be actively supporting the causes of their constituents in whatever way they can, even if that means adding to the escalation of violence. The Ghanaian Chronicle, for instance, reported in its issue of February 14-16, 1994 that:

The Konkomba Youth Association...accused Parliamentary First Deputy Speaker, Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, of arming Nanumbas in preparation for a war against them...Leading representatives of the association said...Dr. Chambas, Member of Parliament for Bimbilla, knew that the Nanumbas were arming themselves.

Naval Capt Dana, the Konkomba spokesman who led the charge said "...they were certain that each time Dr. Chambas visited his constituents he brought them military succour, otherwise where did all the AK47s come from,"⁵⁹ he queried. He further "...alleged that Dr. Chambas inspected the stolen arms [from the Bimbilla Police Station] and was approving of the haul. The Konkombas' break-down of the looted military hardware was 500 rifles, seven submachine guns, five Mark Fours, 50 canisters of tear gas and 300 packets of ammunition."⁶⁰ Although the Konkombas' account of the breakdown of arms taken from the Bimbilla Police Station during the mob attack on the station in mid January 1994, two weeks before the outbreak of the Guinea Fowl war tallied exactly with the official report the Police at Bimbilla issued, Dr. Chambas denied all the allegations.

Whatever the truth in that specific case may be, the accusation that Members of Parliament could have been involved in the escalation of the interethnic arms race was given further credence when another report by Ghanaian Chronicle of February 28 – March 2, 1994 indicated that "Police reports from Buipe also alleged that the MP for Bungkurugu Constituency, Mr. J. Y. Labik was found with six AK 47 rifles when Gonja warriors searched his car on the Buipe-Tamale road"⁶¹. According to the report, Mr. Labik initially refused to disclose the origin and destination of the weapons. However, after the Gonja warriors had subjected him to severe beating he disclosed that the weapons were consigned to an Alhaji in Tamale. According to the report, "...on realizing that Labik was an ally, they (the warriors) released him with the arms."⁶²

It is fair to note, however, that Mr. Labik's arms may not have been intended to support the Dagombas in their conflict with the Konkombas. For, various sources of information available to this researcher indicate that he has been involved in supporting his clan in the intra-Bimoba conflict in another part of the Northern Region. Nonetheless, the fact that the incidence of violent conflicts is triggered by the unimpeded access to sophisticated weapons remains an important part of the increasing frequency and intensity of ethnic wars in northern Ghana. Among the Konkomba's for instance, it is an open secret that the first item every Konkomba man invests in during his lifetime is a gun, despite the fact that they still rely heavily on their traditional war equipment – highly poisonous arrows that leave their victims in advanced stages of decomposition within 48 hours of the hit⁶³. But the scale and intensity of the wars in recent times are definitely beyond the capacity of poisoned arrows, no matter how many may be deployed.

3.2 Civil Society Organizations - Unknown accomplices?

The Northern Region of Ghana is home to several national and international civil society organizations, ranging from faith-based organizations, trade associations and unions, professional associations (such as the Ghana Bar Association, the Ghana National Association of Teachers, the Ghana Medical Association, Association of Ghana Industries, etc.), and nongovernmental development organizations (NGOs), to name just a few. These CSOs are all interethnic in nature and have high levels of interaction between members of the various ethnic groups who belong to them. In addition, all the political parties in the country have membership from all the ethnic groups, and their district and regional executives are, in large part, multi-ethnic in composition.

Varshney, (2002) has pointed out that in troubled spots in India, the existence of robust forms of intercommunal and associational civil society organizations promotes peace, while "their absence or weakness opens up space for communal violence"⁶⁴. Since 1994, civil society organizations in Northern Ghana, especially the nongovernmental organizations have, indeed, become very active promoters of peace in the north. Even the intracommunal CSOs such as the ethnic youth associations (EYAs) have become the bastions of peacebuilding initiatives throughout northern Ghana. The InterNGO Consortium, which brought together all the development oriented NGOs sponsored the peacebuilding and conflict transformation initiatives that enabled all the EYAs to negotiate the Kumasi peace accords which brought peace to the Northern Region. The support of the InterNGO Consortium has also been instrumental in the creation and development of the Northern Region Youth and Development Association (NORYDA), the umbrella organization with representation from all the EYAs, which is now charged with heading up all early warning and conflict resolution initiatives in the region.

The immense potentials for peacebuilding that the post-1994 initiatives of the CSOs in the region have displayed raise questions about why they were not able to engage in these initiatives much earlier, although most of them had lived through similarly violent conflicts in the past. As we have noted earlier, some of these CSOs were, in fact, accused and targeted during the 1994 conflict because their activities were supposed to have been triggers to the conflict. Why were these organizations not conscious of this potential much earlier and incorporate in their agendas, programs to build peace to

avert the outbreak of violence. This and similar questions are the subject of ongoing investigations by this researcher.

For now, suffice it to say that CSOs have been perceived as unwilling accomplices in some of the ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana. In the particular case of the Konkomba-Dagomba conflicts, the activities of faith-based organizations in bringing education to deprived areas sparked off changes in perceptions and increased awareness of interethnic inequalities that may have directly contributed to the escalation of conflicts. Unfortunately, these organizations were ill equipped and unprepared to foresee the effects of the changes they were introducing. They were unable to build the necessary bridges that would transform the conflicts peacefully. That failure makes them unintended agents of war, not peace.

CONCLUSION

Historical factors and wavering contemporary state policies on chieftaincy and land ownership rights have fostered and sustained trends in inter-ethnic exclusion. The postcolonial state failed to initiate structures and systems that would provide platforms for integrating the many ethnic groups in Northern Ghana, especially those that had strained relationships as a result of the colonial imposition of indirect rule. As a result, claims and counterclaims of rights to chieftaincy and land that have emanated from reconstruction and/or reinterpretation of history by ethnic elites remain unresolved. At stake in these contests are deeper issues of rights of whole ethnic groups as citizens of Ghana, a country that came into existence through the merger of several pieces of territories at independence. The commodification of land since the late 1970s has provided fresh impetus for perpetuating the maneuvers for interethnic exclusion in a renewed struggle for ethnic autonomy, of which the Konkomba-Dagomba conflict is but an example of the recurrent interethnic conflicts in northern Ghana.

The increasing frequency, scale and intensity of violent interethnic conflicts in the Northern Region in recent times, therefore, does not come from ancient hatreds or rebellious subjects, as the literature to date portrays. It is largely attributable to the nature and role contemporary state and non-state actors play in reinventing and propagating ethnic myths and symbols. Central to this is the effective politicisation of ethnic conflicts through the co-optation of the media, academic writers and other literary sources, as well as, the leveraging of political platforms to advance mutually exclusive ethnic

agendas. Recourse to violence becomes a preferred option for the voiceless groups when inequitable access to the media and other legitimate channels for redressing ethnic grievances persists. The role of ethnic youth associations is critical to the sustenance, intensity and duration of violence, as they provide the intellectual resources that generate and entrench ethnic positions. These associations also constitute the hub for mobilizing the human, financial and material resources for the ethnic war effort.

The real triggers of violence are, however, identifiable only when the analytical linkages between the local issues and the interest-group politics of contemporary national political and local institutional actors are made. On the national plane, unguarded political statements and uncritical electoral promises made to secure support of ethnic groups create expectations that cannot be met within the framework of existing laws and regulations. Consequently, recourse to some form of violence becomes an option, when strong arm tactics are used to redeem the promises. As the interethnic security dilemma builds up, political face-saving is also secured through acquiescence and/or active participation in the interethnic arms race. Since the leveraging of state power and resources for exclusive ethnic interests is possible, electoral fortunes of politicians become closely associated with the potentials for realizing ethnic agendas. As a result, anticipated political changes at the national level become in and of themselves triggers of conflict, as ethnic groups re-weigh their chances of maintaining and/or enforcing their dominance.

The potential for civil society organizations to be effective bridge builders for peace across ethnic lines has been compromised largely by their unsuspecting role in increasing awareness of interethnic inequalities that have generated the conflicts in the first place. Fortunately, the redirection of the power of civil society organizations as peace builders is taking root. Their interventions have maintained some peace between the Konkombas and Dagombas since 1995. Whether this new found power of civil society movements will prove to be the tool that breaks the cycle of inter- and intra ethnic conflicts in northern Ghana, all of which revolve around the same issues of land and chieftaincy rights, remains to be seen. The key to their success lies in their ability to influence the delinking of the local issues of political competition and land commodification from the politics of elite competition at the national level. That requires engaging powerful local interest groups and influential national leaders. This can prove to be a dangerous enterprise for CSOs.

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1. Government of Ghana, 2000 Population and Housing Census: Summary Report of Final Results, Extracts from Table 4: Ethnic Grouping of Ghanaians by Birth by Region, March, 2002.
2. Contrary to popular insinuations, the term acephalous is not synonymous to the absence of an organized system of governance. Rather, it means that the groups under discussion had no provision in their system of government for an identifiable individual whose sole business in the community is to rule them. In acephalous traditions, power and authority is dispersed among several ordinary individuals who hold no special places of honor in the community by virtue only of their possession of the power they exercise. They lead ordinary lives, like any member of the community.
3. Staniland, Martin: *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana*, Cambridge University Press, London, New York, Melbourne, 1975 Pg 58
4. Boafo-Arthur, Kwame (2001). Chieftaincy and Politics in Ghana since 1982. *West Africa Review*: 3, 1. ISSN: 1525-4488
5. Ibid
6. Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1979, Article 177 (1)
7. The two groups were later re-christened as Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). In 1992, they were renamed Association of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (ACDRs), and presumably registered as an NGO, to bring them in line with the 1992 Constitution.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid
11. Afrani, Mike "Sweeping The Dirt Under the Carpet", *The Ashanti Independent*, Monday 28 February – 6 March 1994
12. In such cases, the boundaries of ownership stretched to as far as where other boundaries have been laid or to the extent that the settler could effectively control. Such boundaries were usually marked off, using natural landmarks such as rivers, hills, important trees etc.
13. Cohen, Roland and John Middleton (eds.) *From Tribe to Nation in Africa: Studies in Incorporation Processes*, Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania 1970 Pg 7
14. As Cohen and Middleton (1970:13) note "... in general, given roughly equal political power; higher status accrues to indigenes". In other words, if the earlier settlers are able to hold up their autonomy, they retained their rights as indigenes and their land may not be acceded to the 'conqueror', except by mutual consent outside the battlefield.
15. It is important to note that the procedure for such donations have deep religious and cultural significance, and often involves rituals in which the giving family or clan permanently abjures its rights to the piece of land.
16. The terms Dagomba and Dagbon, used as adjectives, are synonymous. The first is used mainly in contemporary official parlance, even though the people prefer to use the second in reference to their state. Usage in this text will be reflective of the perspective from which the discussion emanates. For

instance, official documents will talk of the Dagomba Traditional Council while the chiefs and people of Dagbon will refer to a Dagbon Traditional Council.

17. Staniland, Martin, *op. cit.*, Pg 5.
18. Konkomba Youth Association, "Supplementary Paper on Konkomba Position on the Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana", unpublished, undated, Pg. 2.
19. Iddi, M. D Chieftaincy in Dagbon, Field Notes, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1973-74, cited in "Supplementary Paper on Konkomba Position on the Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana.
20. Fynn, Debrah and Nana Dompseh-Buulu, "House Addresses ethnic conflict" Daily Graphic, Thursday February 10, 1994, No. 13436.
21. Abayie Boateng's article on "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: Ghana's Example" (*Anthropology of Africa and the Challenges of the Third Millennium – Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts*, PAAA/APA, 1999.
22. Horowitz, Donald, L. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001 p. 413
23. Martinson, H. B *The Hidden History of Konkomba Wars in Northern Ghana*, Masta Press, Accra, undated. P. 123
24. Staniland, Martin: *The Lions of Dagbon: Political Change in Northern Ghana*, Cambridge University Press, London, New York, Melbourne, 1975 Pg 41
25. Goody, Jack "Marriage Policy and Incorporation in Northern Ghana" in Cohen, Roland and John Middleton (eds.) *From Tribe to Nation in Africa: Studies in Incorporation Processes*, Chandler Publishing Company, Scranton, Pennsylvania 1970 Pg 116
26. In the NGO-sponsored peace negotiations after the 1994/95 conflict Konkombas have pointed out that although they find themselves in many other districts, they have not laid claims to any lands in those districts except in the eastern portions of the Northern region, where they believe they have their homeland.
27. Pul, Hippolyt A. S, Field notes on the research on Chieftaincy Institution in Northern Ghana, Yendi, May 1993. Statements from interviews with Philip Dibabe, then National President of Konkomba Youth Association, later corroborated by other interviewees on both sides. For instance, Fynn, Debrah and Nana Dompseh-Buulu, reported that Moses Bukari Mabengbam, the Member of Parliament for Saboba at the time of the 1994 conflict, asked B.A Fuseini (referenced above), "if you say we are not Ghanaians why do you marry our women to have our blood in your paramourty. (Reference: "Daily Graphic", Thursday February 10, 1994, No. 13346)
28. *Minutes of Conference of Dagbamba (Dagomba) Chiefs held at Yendi from the 21st to 29th November, 1930 to Enquire into and Record the Constitution of the State of Dagbon*, Paragraph 16, p. 3.
29. Konings, Piet: (Edited by Ravell, J.J: *The State and Rural Class Formation in Ghana A Comparative Analysis*; London, 1986.
30. In contrast, under the same laws, lands in the southern half of the country belonged to the traditional groups, not the government.
31. Kwame Bentsi-Enchill (1964) *Ghana Land Law An Exposition, Analysis and Critique*, Law inAfrica, No. 10 Sweet & Maxwell African Universities Press 1964, Pg 37.
32. Konkomba Youth Association "Supplementary Paper on Konkomba Position on the Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana, Pg. 6, unpublished, undated.
33. Konings, Piet: (Edited by Ravell, J.J: *The State and Rural Class Formation in Ghana A Comparative Analysis*; London, 1986.
34. "Report of the Committee on ownership of Lands and Position in the Northern and Upper Regions", 1978, (Unpublished) Pg 5, #10.
35. Stuart J. Kauffman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2001, p. 12

36. Ibid.
37. Kwesi Yankah (Prof.), Guinea Fowls and Their Neighbours, Woes of a Kwatriot column in *The Mirror*, February 19, 1994, p.2
38. Bejabdon Najar, "Northern Region On Fire", *The Statesman Weekending* March 6, 1994
39. Stuart J. Kauffman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2001
40. Under the laws governing the sale or leasing of land, the signature of the chief under whose purview the piece of land lies is required before the Lands Commission can process the leases. Chiefs have come to institute fees chargeable for every lease they sign.
41. Unconfirmed information received by this researcher during field studies suggest that one such lawyer in Tamale owns as many as 74 plots of land, each measuring approximately 100 feet by 100 feet, all in one location in the Naa Luro suburb of Tamale. Similar land holdings by the same lawyer in other parts of the Municipality were alluded to.
42. Notes from interviews with Dr. David Mensah, a Mo by birth and currently a Canadian national, who works as the Canadian Consular in Northern Ghana.
43. Kwaku Sakyi-Addo and Kofi Opere-Addo, "War of Words: Konkombas Accuse Chambas....But he denies it", *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, February 14-16, 1994 Pg 1 continued on pg 12).
44. *Daily Graphic*, Friday, February 11, 1994
45. In "Mabengba Breaks His Silence", *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, March 14-16, 1994 Vol. 3 No. 39.
46. Abayie Boaten's article on "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Africa: Ghana's Example" (*Anthropology of Africa and the Challenges of the Third Millennium – Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts*, PAA/APA, 1999
47. Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1952 cited in Supplementary Paper on Konkomba Position on the Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana.
48. Dagomba Traditional Council, letter of 22nd October 1993 P. 4
49. Kwesi Yankah, op. cit, column 2
50. Ibid.
51. Konkomba Position Paper, July 1994 to the Permanent Negotiation Team into Conflicts in the Northern Region of Ghana (unpublished), p. 10
52. Unknown contributor of an eyewitness' story of the war reported in *The Ghanaian Voice*, 9th – 13th March 1994.
53. I. K. Mac Arthur "Represent all groups in N.R" in *Daily Graphic*, Friday, March 11, 1994. No. 13461.
54. *The Statesman*, Weekending February 20, 1994.
55. *Statesman Reporter*: "A myth broken" *The Statesman*, Weekending February 20, 1994
56. *Ghanaian Times*, Thursday, December 2 1993, No. 11,339 – front page
57. Ibid,
58. *Statesman Reporter*: "A myth is broken", *The Statesman*, Weekending February 20, 1994.
59. Kwaku Sakyi-Addo and Kofi Opere-Addo, op. cit
60. Ibid.
61. Abdallah Kassim, Police Swoop on Arms Traffickers, *Ghanaian Chronicle* February 28 – March 2, 1994.
62. Abdallah Kassim, Police Swoop on Arms Traffickers, *Ghanaian Chronicle* February 28 – March 2, 1994.
63. Carnage in the North, *Daily Graphic*, Monday February 14, 1994
64. Varshney, Ashutosh, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002