

## Ethnic Conflicts and Democratization: New Paths Toward Equilibrium in Northern Ghana

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As Ghana celebrates two generations of independence, northern ethnic conflicts and chieftaincy disputes, which were rigorously suppressed in colonial times, have come back to mar the track toward democratization. The first is between the so-called minority or chief-less peoples and those with chiefs or traditional state systems. The non-chiefly peoples seek their own chiefs, their own land and their own ethnic identity; while the traditional states, whose chiefs have long controlled northern peoples, seek power at both the regional and national levels through their claim to the land. The other is a power struggle between the two major factions of the most important of these states – Dagbon. Due to the colonial legacy that was continued by Nkrumah and subsequent governments, the traditional state of Dagbon has long been the key to northern power, which has made it a valuable commodity to southern politics. The government, through its open support for one chiefly faction over the other, continues to affirm these outmoded structures. Added to this, Islamic states now strengthen and support the traditional state through a widespread process of Arab-ization. The fact that the traditional state in its present form is quite incompatible with a modern democracy presents a dangerous dilemma. The democratic process has just begun for the politically and economically marginalized northern non-chiefly majority, and both such conflicts and disputes are bound to increase if the traditional state itself is not democratized.

We are currently celebrating Ghana's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence. These years have been marked by momentous changes extending from the end of colonialism through the heart of the cold-war era to the rise of new global political and economic configurations such as the EU as the newest superpower and the waking juggernaut of Islamic fundamentalism to the African Union's resurrected proposal for a "United States of Africa".

During the first three decades of this era the West looked upon Africa as a political marketplace, a chessboard filled with potential allies and enemies of capitalism. This approach produced a number of anomalies including such imponderables as Western-supported forms of totalitarian capitalism. In those competitive times African dictatorial governments were befriended as the lesser of two evils – safer to support a capitalistic dictatorship than democratic socialism, after all, who could one really trust! But by the end of this 30-year period disillusionment set in as most of the new states had squandered their birth right and were plummeting toward political and economic disintegration.

The latter two decades brought even greater change. The advent of discos to Red Square set all of Africa dancing to the tune of democratic capitalism. Former dictators and war lords went rushing to get "democratically" elected and turned in their epaulets for Brooks Brothers suits faster than a chameleon could change from kaki to the darker shades of Africa's new urban nightmares. But the new arrangements behind the "I-go-see-you, you-no-go-see-me" glasses have not been able to produce any better solutions for Africa's growing problems. Is Africa ready for democracy? Is the democratic process really taking hold? Or is it a case of the same old thing in slightly new garb? As one military man recently retorted when I pleaded for protection against

an appalling increase in local crime, "Ghana now be democracy! No fit put dem rascals for jail." It is still an open question whether "funny democracies" will fare any better than any of the other political experiments of the past, and even more of a question is whether the process itself will open a new Pandora's Box of regionalism where factions and sub-factions handle the day-to-day democratic process through mini-militias of layabouts and thugs. These are some of the more disturbing questions arising as democratization becomes the new panacea for Africa's political and economic woes.

#### GHANA AND DEMOCRATIZATION

At this juncture in its 50-year history, some maintain that Ghana is in a better position to augur Africa's future democratic prospects than most of her neighbors. Since its first step toward economic recovery from a 1984 rock-bottom low, when Head of State, Jerry Rawlings, turned to the IMF for his first loan, the figures have shown consistent economic growth and increased stability (see Sandbrook, R. and J. Oelbaum, 1999). After 21 years of military rule the 1992 elections ushered in the Fourth Republic and a new democratic profile for the NDC. This and their second election in 06 won the tentative confidence of Western governments and investors, and this confidence has been aggressively fostered and extended by the NPP party following their political victories in 2000 and 2004.

But political and economic stability do not automatically accompany democratization and figures of economic growth can be fudged. Observers have shown that Ghana's economic boom is not solidly based on industrial or agricultural production but on leveraged aid, development money, and Western-financed democratic hype (see Aryeetey *et al.*, 2000, and Van de Walle, 2001). The biggest industry in Ghana today is the "development industry" Much of Ghana's touted stability is a mirage built on prospects of unlimited gold and all of this could evaporate faster than a new Charles Taylor could seize a small West African country.

In very real terms, Ghana's poor are getting poorer, especially those in the North, while the rich are getting much richer, much faster. Those benefiting most from democracy are the rich and powerful" and these are mostly southerners. Yet the North provides most of Ghana's food, and it is the poverty-ridden non-chiefly peoples at the bottom of the heap who produce it. This has already had far-reaching ethno-political consequences. The fierce tiger of ethnic conflict was unleashed in 1994 and, although quiet for the moment, is crouching on the verge of Ghana's now treeless rainforests, its youth-less villages and jobless cities.

#### AIMS OF THIS ESSAY

This essay examines Ghana's potential for political and economic development in the light of a fundamental impediment to democracy, namely the Traditional African State and the various forces at work to sustain or change this and its institutions of servitude so alien to democracy. In particular, we examine two of these forces: the series of northern ethnic conflicts between chiefly and non-chiefly peoples culminating in 1994 with a conflagration just short of civil war, and the present chieftaincy crisis in Dagbon.

We shall begin with a description of the 1994 Northern Conflict and its terrible consequences for the economy and political stability of the region, and indeed the

nation. Secondly we shall introduce the possibility of a new political integration, a new approach to the minority wars and chiefly power struggles, a new equilibrium, by taking our cue from a long discarded model introduced by the colonial anthropologist, Meyer Fortes.

Next we shall take up four factors of change which demarcate the foundations of a possible new approach. These are: (1) The ethno-political factor which calls for an enlarged traditional state that embraces the new political and ethnic identities that have been formed since independence. (2) The war factor which calls our attention to the new characteristics of the contemporary democratic wars that are occurring across Africa. These are discussed in terms of six characteristics which distinguish them from all previous conflicts. (3) The religious factor which brings to the fore the momentous changes that have occurred as a result of education and Westernization which went hand in hand with Christianity, on the one hand and the movement toward a new Arab-influenced Islam on the other. Christianity has come to be associated with the so-called minorities while Islam has become firmly linked with those belonging to the traditional states. In a former times ritual re-established equilibrium. Nowadays quasi-political religions affiliations have intensified polarization along the lines of ethnic and family identity and are strong forces for chaos. Is there a basis here for new ritual equilibrium? (4) The land factor which drives the quest for new political and economic arrangements, most urgently requires attention. The historical roots of land ownership reside in the Earth as a spiritual force for fertility and sustenance upon which both chiefly and non-chiefly peoples depend for their livelihood. Custodians or priests of the Earth interceded to insure its abundance for humankind. Can a new integration be generated between Earth as spiritual entity and Earth as economic and political commodity which builds on the traditional ideals of solidarity and interdependence?

Any new, hopefully democratic, social and political integration depends, to a large extent, upon how these four factors of change are dealt with. We shall conclude by pointing to a more positive direction than is currently envisioned for each.

#### I. THE 1994 NORTHERN CONFLICT

During the dry season of 1994 a massive tribal war brought to a head a series of 20 odd ethnic conflicts which had been occurring almost yearly since 1980 (see Pul, 2003). These conflagrations put to the test in the northern part of the country the basic principles of Ghana's new parliamentary democracy. While the rest of the world looked on (or rather was distracted by similar more publicized events in Rwanda and Burundi) Ghana's chiefly tribes (state societies) battled the non-chiefly groups (acephalous societies), not over a guinea fowl as the play-it-down southern press consistently chided, but for deep-seated political, economic, religious and cultural issues.

The fundamental nature of the issues moved things toward ever greater escalation and polarization (see Bogner, 2000, and Van der Linde & Naylor, 1999). Earlier skirmishes between these two mega-groupings had been localized and limited: Mamprusi vs Kusasi, Gonja vs Vagla, Gonja vs Lobi, Gonja vs Nawuri, Gonja vs Konkomba, Nanumba vs Konkomba and Dagomba vs Konkomba. Gradually the chiefly groups began to form alliances until, by Christmas, 1993, the chiefly Gonja had aligned themselves with the chiefly Dagomba and Nanumba against all the non-

chiefly groups across the Northern Region. The Wala and Mamprusi peoples, the two other northern chiefly groups of the Upper West and Upper East Regions respectively, resisted invitations to join the chiefly coalition because they were surrounded and outnumbered by non-chiefly groups.

With escalation came polarization. The old Ghanaian adage: 'friends of friends are friends and friends of enemies are enemies' was applied to ethnicities across Ghana. As the situation 'hotted up' even the southern Ewes living in the Dagomba territory of Tamale had to flee for their lives because inadvertently they had got themselves aligned with the northern non-chiefly groups. Dagomba in Tamale also kept a watchful eye on the other many non-chiefly groups from the Upper East and Upper West Regions living in Tamale. Although they were not directly involved in the conflict over Northern Region lands, allegiances with their non-chiefly brothers were presumed and thus many of them also fled the Region.

As the involvement, the alliances and the polarizations increased, so did the violence and the destruction. This was barely contained in the North and came within a hair's breadth of extending to the South as a full-blown civil war. The police disappeared and the military was withheld during the first four weeks of the war. The only thing that stopped the violence from progressing southward was the decisive and forceful action taken by the Asantehene who made it clear that if any outbreak of ethnic violence should occur in Asante extreme measures would be applied to both sides. A strong religious dimension added to the polarization. Over the 15 years of escalation the non-chiefly groups had come to be more and more identified with Christians and the chiefly groups with Muslims.

In the aftermath of the war, the Rawlings-led NDC government naturally wished to assure everyone concerned that the situation was stable and that such an outbreak would never happen again. But in their rush to 'keep the lid on' they only aggravated the problem. There was a great deal of miscommunication surrounding the issues, which were not well understood by decision makers. Besides the inclination for each side to pile up grievances and to nurture their own biases there was also a tendency for policy makers to ignore the wider implications of the conflict. Many saw it as an internal affair which must be solved locally and which should not have to concern outsiders unless they got in the way. For years after the conflict I was asked, 'Why are the development agencies afraid to come back?'<sup>1</sup> We Ghanaians are not like the Zairians or Liberians, we have not harmed any Whites!<sup>2</sup> But this is not the only issue that concerns Western NGOs, diplomats and business interests. They also want to be assured that the root causes are being addressed.

The war was 13 years ago. In this relatively peaceful period there have been only minor skirmishes, which have been very quickly contained due to a number of mediatory and preventative measures that were put in place by peacebuilding NGOs<sup>2</sup>. But feelings still run strong and, most importantly, there has never been any real resolution to the conflict or any final agreement between the warring parties. The real issues have never been addressed by the parties or by the successive governments.

#### ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE WAR

The war has had a traumatic effect on all the northern peoples and it has permanently changed the political and economic stability of the country as a whole. Although very

few reports reached the outside world and the official governmental accounts greatly minimized the whole affair, thousands were killed<sup>3</sup> and wounded on both sides and hundreds of thousands were displaced.<sup>4</sup> It seriously disrupted agricultural production for a full year and certain effects of the war continue to restrict normal commerce and governmental services, especially food production, education and healthcare. Even at this moment no Konkomba dares risk his life by living in Yendi or Tamale<sup>5</sup>, the administrative centers and commercial hubs of the North.

But, to make matters worse, the conflict has set back the development of the North by decades. The most underdeveloped part of Ghana has always been the North. Even the colonial regime judged that its only resource was the raw labor of its people. And now even this resource has been jeopardized. The work of most NGOs, development organizations, and businesses in the Northern Region virtually ground to a halt and remained stymied until 2000. For years most of the development focused on relief, rehabilitation and the peace-making process. German bi-lateral aid, which was one of the largest and most consistent sources of help, finally returned, in a much reduced form and with more limited objectives, as MOFA.

#### NATIONAL POLITICAL EFFECTS OF THE WAR

The war drastically affected the political process in the North and in the country as a whole. From the time of Nkrumah the formula for political success had always been: "If you have the North you have the country." The main reason for this is built into the colonial arrangements of indirect rule whereby the entire population was organized through the chiefs. The colonial administration gave orders to the chiefs who carried them out through their subjects. Fearing Asante power, Nkrumah, divested the southern chiefs of their authority and instituted parallel governmental structures at every level which were controlled by him. But because the northern chiefs, especially the "Abudu" line of Dagomba chiefs, had been so well organized by the British, he kept their structures intact and reinforced this by placing Abudu chiefs' sons in the parallel governmental positions, thus merging the traditional institutions with the state apparatus and putting them both at the loyal service of his political machine. This merging set the scene for patronage and the politics of regionalism which will be discussed below.

In this way Nkrumah was assured of a 100% loyal following from the North and, with this under his belt, he could confidently take on any southern opposition. Subdued opposition to Nkrumah, however, was taken up by the other "gate" in Dagbon, the "royalist" Andani chiefly line, and eventually these two gates became the northern counterparts to the incumbents and opposition parties at the national level. More on how this plays out democratically below.

Busia too, in the Second Republic, depended on Abudu chiefs to form his northern constituency. And Rawlings, no friend of the Asante, also made use of the northern chiefly structures, but under the opposing Andani gate. Through their backing he won the 1992 elections by a landslide. But the 04 war permanently broke the back of northern political unity through the chiefs and the chiefly elites for the first priority of the numerically more numerous non-chiefly peoples was now to oppose their predatory chiefs. The 1996 elections were anomalous in that many minorities continued to vote for Rawlings' NDC, in spite of his support for Andani chiefs, because of his charismatic appeal to the "little man". But, with Rawlings out of the

picture, the 2000 elections gave a truer reading of the northern disunity that had been brought about by the 1947 war. In the absence of northern unanimity the Asante-controlled NPP won a decisive victory. But in order to control the North the NPP needed to have their northern chiefly support group, the Abudu gate, on the skin of Dagbonö. Since the position of Ya Na or öKing of Dagbonö is for life the only way for this to happen would be for the incumbent Andani King, Ya Na Yakubu II, to die.

#### REGIONAL POLITICAL EFFECTS OF THE WAR

Since taking power in 2000, the NPP has experienced its own share of conflicts. But theirs have not been between chiefly and non-chiefly groups. Rather they have been between the two traditional leadership factions in Dagbonö the so-called gates of Abudu and Andani. A history of political patronage has irretrievably linked the politics of regionalism with those of the nation so that whenever there is a major shift in the national political scene the North has come to expect a corresponding change in local traditional leadership. Let us briefly retrace this history.

It all began in 1948 when the colonial government stepped in to name an Abudu Ya Na because his policies of reform favored colonial interests. Then in 1953 Nkrumah stepped in to arrange for the continuation of the Abudu gate when customarily it should have alternated to the Andani line. Then in 1968, after the Abudu King, Ya Na Abudulai III, died then Head of State Ankrah stepped in to prevent the installation of Abudulai IV and appointed an Andani (Andani III) to succeed. Andani III died shortly afterwards and in 1970 the Second Republic began with Busia ordering the Andaniö out of the palace, which resulted in a clash between police and Andani supporters in which 23 were killed. But with Busiaö support Abudulai IV succeeded. Then, in 1972, when Busia was ousted by Acheampongö coup, Abudulai IV was deposed and the Andaniö succeeded with Yakubu II as Ya Na. Yakubu II remained in power until he was murdered. Thus five shifts in Northern chiefly politics followed closely upon five corresponding shifts in party ascendancy at the national level.

With the shift in power following the 2000 elections from NDC to NPP, a corresponding shift in northern power from the incumbent Andani family to the opposing Abudu family was strongly anticipated. This is exactly what happened. In March, 2002 the Andani Ya Na Yakubu II and some 30 of his household were murdered, in what had the flavor of a military operation, by a still unidentified group of assassins. Thus the nationö attention was drawn away from inter-ethnic conflicts to those taking place within ranks of the ruling peoples themselves. The Andani supporters, quick to discern motive and opportunity, cried foul. The desecration of the kingö body by cutting off the head and arms was clearly intended to render the kingö death ritually impure or make it a öbad deathö. In such cases traditionally there could be no funeral and the name must be forever struck from human memory, thus denying the right of succession to any of his children. Following the NPP victory in 2000, Abudu elites had come to occupy top governmental positions, including the vice-presidency and minister of the interior. And many Andani are still asking, how is it possible that five years after these horrendous events took place the perpetrators have still not been found or brought to justice and there is still no Ya Na? Although there is a 60 year old tradition of such shenanigans, it doesnö march to the new tune of democratization.

Although these inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts of the north seem to be quite distinct and unrelated on the surface, on closer inspection they are both part of the same process – that of tailoring the “traditional state” to modern institutions, including those termed “democratic” which derive inspiration and support from the West.

#### SEEKING NEW MODELS OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN AFRICA

The series of conflicts, especially the mega-conflict in 1994, are part of a larger political process now taking place across Africa by which disenfranchised ethnic groups are discovering their Constitutional rights through a wide range of activities including war. Conflicts are not new to Africa. Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) set forth the major themes toward the end of the colonial era in their classic study, *African Political Systems*, which sought to interpret Africa’s two major forms of traditional political organization, the stratified “state” systems and the segmentary lineage or “acephalous” systems, for academia and for British colonial administrators in their work of managing potential and real conflicts. Now it is time for a revised edition which seeks not colonial integrations but global co-existence.

Fortes introduced the “dynamic equilibrium” model to the colonial rulers as the key managerial concept. He maintained that there is a tendency toward “equilibrium” in segmentary lineage systems that is apparent at every level of social organization – kinship, economic relations and “the nexus of ritual interdependencies” (1978: 271). Taking the Talensi of northern Ghana as his case study, a group who were at that time popularly considered to be at the bottom of the social evolutionary scale, he spoke of jural notions and procedures as being in a “dynamic equilibrium” of “counterposed ties and cleavages, of complementary institutions and ideological notions” (1978: 271). In Fortes’s view, “the principal mechanism by means of which this equilibrium is maintained is the balanced distribution of authority and prerogative, on the one hand, and of obligations and responsibilities – economic, jural, moral and ritual – on the other” (1978: 271). The factors that actively restrict conflict and promote equilibrium are “the homogeneity of Tale culture, the undifferentiated economic system, the territorial stability of the population, the network of kinship ties, the ramifications of clanship, and especially the conception of the common good . . .” (1978: 271).

Although not self-destructive, Fortes’s notion of equilibrium is a vortex of tension. “It might explode violently when the specific interests of a unit were violated. But conflict could never develop to the point of bringing about a complete disintegration” (1978: 271). In Fortes’s view, “War was the ultimate sanction against the violation or submergence of the specific rights of the corporate units constituting Tale social structure, and the ties of ritual collaboration, the sanction preventing the complete disintegration of this structure into anarchically independent factions” (1978: 271). The same could be said of the Konkomba, even to this day. Not far from this premise yet following a different approach was Max Gluckman (1956) working out of the Manchester School of conflict analysis. He focused less on equilibrium and more on the nature of the conflicts themselves, but came to a similar conclusion, namely that conflict actually strengthens bonds and fortifies the system as a whole.

The Fortes peace recipe for the colonial administration (and this was the reason he was invited to study the Talensi in the first place) was to foster equilibrium through a

wide range of balances involving all aspects of social life. But the elegant equilibrium theories didn't appeal to the Colonial Office. From D.C. down to political officer they were interested in what was practicable for on-the-spot decisions regarding the mustering of road gangs, the collection of head taxes and limiting the number of violent skirmishes and feuds. The self-limiting nature of local conflicts reassured administrators and favored a policy of swift retribution rather than prevention. Rather than any fostering of the state of equilibrium, the day to day running of the Northern Territories fostered extortionist management by baneful chiefs ruling those who a generation earlier they had enslaved, on behalf of the British whose authority was backed up by the strong punitive forces of outsiders, mainly Hausa *ɔ̀dansanda*.

Nowadays, what is happening in Africa goes well beyond the breadth of old equilibrium models. The factors that promoted equilibrium in Fortes's day have changed. The minority peoples are now less homogeneous culturally but better organized politically and militarily. In their discovery of their own ethnicity, which took place largely as a result of a growing literacy in the 60s and 70s, a new kind of political identity emerged, although we have yet to see any real homogeneity there. When asked who they are by strangers, northerners from these minority ethnicities no longer refer to themselves as belonging to one of the majority groups, their former oppressors, but they take pride in using their own traditional names: Konkomba, Nawuri, Vagla, Birifor, Lobi, etc.

Their economic systems are becoming more sophisticated, with more craft specializations and more elaborate controls over their agricultural production—growing the yams that feed the nation. Large populations of non-chiefly peoples are on the move to the sparsely populated, rich farmlands in the middle belt of Ghana whose inhabitants were decimated by the slave trade. The formerly strong kinship ties and other commonalities have been weakened by migrations and education. Their notions of the common good have been broadened by their enlarged identities, on the one hand, and are gradually giving way to individualistic values and democratic ideals on the other. The ritual offices, once essential for maintaining the balance, are now made ineffectual by the large territorial expanses, disparate beliefs of mixed populations, new religions, new identities and symbols, and new claimants to traditional ritual authority.

If local wars in Fortes's and Gluckman's day were a sanction preventing complete disintegration or a way of strengthening bonds, nowadays they seem rather to hasten disintegration and shatter the bonds. These wars, far from being self-limiting, have increased consistently and are becoming more violent and destructive at every turn. Moreover, this seems to be true of wars in Africa as a whole, where we see local conflicts swiftly expanding to the regional level, and from there developing into full-scale civil wars.

Today we stand before a precipice that is either a larger integration process or anarchy. To do justice to Fortes, these models offered in a by-gone era are integrational and, although they reflect the circumstances of their times, the striving toward integration, Fortes would maintain, is a perduring aspect of the African ethos and not limited to his times alone.<sup>6</sup> If there is a larger integration coalescing, these models may still help us to recognize it. But we must first grasp the expanse of new issues and perspectives and understand the contexts from which they have emerged.



To do this we shall consider four factors of change. Hopefully they will help us to envision the basis for a new integration.

### I. THE ETHNO-POLITICAL FACTOR

In northern Ghana, over the last 500 years, the indigenous Guan and Gur peoples have been gradually reforming their identities in a grand movement from a structurally simple social organization involving leadership by clan elders backed up by religious beliefs in the primal authority of the ancestors and territorial gods, to a more highly structured form of social organization, a traditional state involving secular rulers and supported by more elaborate religious institutions including beliefs and rituals involving a trans-territorial God. This has been part of an older, more extensive process of state formation in the West African Sudan as a whole whereby diverse cultures were incorporated into larger, more stratified social and political organizations at the lowest rung of the hierarchy (see E. Goody, 1973 and Kirby, 1986). The hierarchy designated specialization, distinguished the degrees of identity or belonging and structured the processes by which higher statuses and identities were acquired. This process of traditional state formation, which has greatly increased in intensity and speed over the last fifty years, is now being challenged by modern institutions and democratic processes from the West to undergo an even greater and more rapid transition.

At the religious level, state systems traced their theological and symbolic blueprint to the concept of an overarching ðsky Godð (Naa-wuni). This state God or ðhigh Godð exercised authority over the many lesser ðEarth deitiesð within the state's territory, just as chiefs exercised authority over the many cultural sub-groups that inhabited these areas. Thus power relations in the visible world (chiefs over subjects) came to imitate and be confirmed by those believed to obtain in the unseen world (sky God over Earth deities).<sup>7</sup> Although the roots of state formation in the Western Sudan are pre-Islamic and are linked to a host of political, economic and social factors including agricultural specialization, increased production, the appearance of cities, slavery and long-distance trading, Muslim clerics found a convenient social niche for their specializations within the hierarchical structure of these early Sudanic states (see Levtzion, 1968).

Among the Gur and Guan peoples of northern Ghana, the traditional state was introduced through small roving bands of raiders who were descended from those who evolved the concept of state at the headwaters of the Niger river ð the West African fertile crescent ð more than a millennium earlier. In the earlier period<sup>8</sup> the raiding was more or less benevolent and it encouraged the over-production needed to support state apparatus. But in the latter stages, especially after the conquest of the North by the Asante in the 1740s, the raiding became predatory.<sup>9</sup> Colonial rule in 1900 finally brought peace and order to a largely depopulated and anarchic North.

Both during and after the colonial period the traditional state structures were fostered and strengthened. The British put an end to all seasonal raiding and laid down policies for local indirect rule. Where pre-colonial states relied for their sustenance upon food-raiding followed by slave-raiding and maintaining slave villages, the British instituted taxes. But under indirect rule they also greatly expanded the power and prestige of the chiefs and changed the concept and structure of the West African traditional state to meet their own administrative needs. The peaceful environment

engendered population growth, fostered trade and increased agricultural production, while the colonial political policies brought about changes in political identity and ethnicity.

For the majority of the peoples of northern Ghana, who did not belong to a traditional state and who highly cherished their untrammelled freedoms, the imposition of chiefs to collect taxes and muster forced labor was the essence of colonial repression. It gave license for their former raiders to extort with even greater efficiency than raiding. The colonial regime regarded this amorphous blend of acephalous peoples who inhabited their Northern Territories of the Gold Coast as a liability, a contentious mass that had to be managed with as little input as possible. Together they shared one political identity: they were the *õminoritiesõ*. But if the system repressed and extorted those without chiefs it was also a means to limited power for those having chiefs. Thus some of the *õminoritiesõ* quite freely began to enter the stratified state systems at the lowest rungs. By becoming *õcommonersõ* within a state system or by buying minor chiefly titles many *õminoritiesõ* also came to share some of the power and prestige of the state system.

*õNon-chieflyõ* groups of autochthones on the edges of Dagomba-land, Nanumba-land and Gonja-land, and along the main commercial routes quickly learned the languages and cultures of their imposed rulers and gradually forgot their lesser identities (see Crowder, 1968: 345; Froelich, 1945: 251). Comparisons of population statistics between 1910 (Togo ANT/FA) and 1960 (Ghana, 1964) demonstrate impossible growth rates for chiefly groups and improbably little growth in the numbers of autochthones.<sup>10</sup> During this period we find whole villages that changed their identities (including their language) from Konkomba slaves to Dagomba commoners within one generation.<sup>11</sup>

This process is not new. The most basic mechanism for cultural assimilation has always been through kinship. After raiding was prohibited, those formerly raided continued their client relationship by sending women to their former masters. Low status commoners and non-chiefly peoples (formerly slaves) on the territorial fringes sent women to high status chiefs in order to gain favor and perhaps eventually acquire a chief who would be a true native son. For example, the grandmother of the late Ya Na Yakubu II was a Konkomba and the mother of his first son, the present regent, was also a Konkomba<sup>12</sup>, which is why he had to flee Yendi during the war. As more of the autochthonous women were brought into the system, more of the Gur groups became *õDagomba-izedõ* and more of the Guan groups became *õGonja-izedõ*.<sup>13</sup>

Today, intimately linked with the process of democratization, we are experiencing, on the part of the *õminoritiesõ*, a sudden shift away from the institutions of the traditional state, at least as it had been molded by colonial indirect rule. New political and ethnic identities are being formed. Peoples who never before thought of themselves as a *real* tribe but merely a *õminorityõ* at the bottom rung of a traditional state are now suddenly aware of the importance of their own languages and cultures. They now want social and political recognition.<sup>14</sup> They want to have their own chiefs and their own land like other groups, and they want to have a democratic voice in their own governance. During the conflict many Konkomba villages along the Demon and Tatalé roads, who had been calling themselves *õDagombaõ* for a generation, suddenly switched back to calling themselves *õKonkombaõ*. Some of those in high position

within the old dispensation feel threatened, and some in the lower positions, like Dagomba commoners, feel cheated. The very problem the British had avoided through indirect rule in colonial times, i.e. how to deal with the plurality of northern ethnicities, has come back to wreak havoc in the present time.

## II. THE WAR FACTOR

Through indirect rule the British frugally managed the entire Northern Territories and created a dynasty of elite, princely administrators to succeed them. The chiefly estate, directed by a coterie of politician princes, is the direct heir to the political apparatus of indirect rule, and, even today, both the structures themselves and those maintaining them continue to hold the minority groups in subjugation. Although outwardly modern and democratic, this neo-colonial apparatus backed by a medieval mentality has been reinforced by Republic after Republic from Nkrumah to Rawlings to Kuffour. Now, for the northern minorities, democratization involves the dismantling of these colonial vestiges through what are essentially ethnic wars of independence.

### 1. DIFFERENT CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF WAR AND PEACE

These democratic wars demonstrate a number of characteristics that are quite different from anything that went on before. These differences can help us to understand changes that have occurred which can, in turn, help us to structure a new equilibrium. The first is the conflict clearly showed that the two sides hold considerably different notions of war itself, and therefore of what constitutes peaceful negotiation and resolution. From the perspective of the state system elites, wars are for conquest or maintenance of over-rule and domination. The jargon surrounding the recruitment of the chiefly Gonja and Dagomba youth by elite warlords to go to the battle front was to teach these our slaves a lesson they will never forget. It was hailed as a war to end all wars, a final solution. Their aim in war, as in general politics, was and still is conquest and domination. Power is used to extract privileges, assets and booty. Its roots go back to the pre-colonial past when all of northern Ghana was theirs for the raiding a store of resources and manpower to be collected through razzias on horseback every dry season.

To the non-chiefly peoples, however, war, as was clearly described above by Fortes, is to defend rights and property, to redress wrongs, to settle disputes, and to reclaim properties and rights that have been stolen or infringed upon. It is, thus, defensive or redressive; not predatory. The minorities have no interest in conquering or in ruling others. Furthermore, war is usually a last resort. It is meant to resolve conflicts, not expand them. It is a form of self-help used only when all other means have failed.<sup>15</sup> The 1994 war was not the final solution the chiefly groups hoped for. Nor did it really resolve anything. There were neither victors nor vanquished, but, in some way, democracy got a foothold. For it sent a clear message to the chiefly peoples that any further domination will not be tolerated.

### 2. THE MASSIVE SCALE OF THE CONFLICT

A second characteristic is the larger geographic and demographic scale of the conflict. Unlike the former minority clan feuds, or even the seasonal raids of the chiefly groups, these democratic wars can no longer be localized. In the early 1980s isolated minority groups fought small skirmishes against their local chiefs. Next some groups joined forces but the battles were still localized. In the 1994 conflict, however,

an amalgam of five minorities fought against all three chiefly groups of the Northern Region, the hostilities took place throughout the region and were barely contained even there. The war went on for a much longer time than any previous incident and it is still unsettled. One of the indicators that it has still not been settled is the fact that the chiefly elites still do not allow the minority groups, especially the Konkomba or Bassari, to live in Yendi or Tamale.

The spectre of war cast a shadow of suspicion on all the acephalous groups of the North. As the war continued, rumors spread that these others, especially the Dagaaba, The Frafra and Kassena in Tamale, would soon be attacked. Suspicion also fell on Tamale's Ewe population who were forced to flee back to their homes in the Volta Region. Many say that the Kusasi and even the Bi-Moba<sup>16</sup> from the Upper East Region would have joined the Konkomba if the Mamprusi had joined the Gonja and Dagomba. By the time the rainy season came in May '94 there were no more pitched battles, but virtually the whole of the North had taken sides one way or the other. Very little has changed in these alliances over the past 13 years. The chiefly elites may have the backing of the government and the armed forces but the new minorities have definitely managed to unite under new tribal and trans-tribal identities. If there is another war, no matter where or when it begins, within a very short time all the northern peoples will be directly involved, and the battlefield will be the entire North.

### 3. THE GREATER VIOLENCE OF THE CONFLICT

A third characteristic is that the stakes are so much higher now than before. The Northern Region, the largest Region in Ghana, is blessed with vast, rich and empty farmland. If Ghana's future is in agricultural production then the Northern Region will be its heartland. Who controls it controls Ghana.

Closely linked to the increased stakes is the vastly increased scale of the violence. For example, traditional warfare did not harm the women. But the '94 conflict witnessed hundreds of women casualties. Official reporting necessarily kept the figures low to allay unnecessary alarm. But at least one commentator (see Katanga, 1994) claims that over two hundred thousand, mostly chiefly peoples, were made homeless and that up to 20,000 were killed. There were thousands of women refugees from both sides. But, quite ironically, many of the Dagomba women fled to Accra where they became load carriers (*kaya*), the lowest level of laborer, in the central markets of Accra, especially the Konkomba-controlled yam market. This has inspired a host of social evils as a new generation of Dagomba women freely join their sisters in order to build up a dowry (*furu*) which they hope to bring into marriage.<sup>17</sup>

Part of the violence and destruction is due to the numbers of combatants but it is also because of the sophisticated weaponry used. Now a child with an AK-47 can do more damage with less compunction than any traditional raiding party. Although most of the deaths were caused by cutlass wounds, and the majority of the weapons were shotguns or ancient cap guns using home-made gunpowder, as the war progressed more and more automatic weapons started accumulating. It was common talk during the build up to the conflict that AKs were being assembled in Tamale and could be had for about 300 USD each. I was offered one. And there were rumors of weaponry and training being made available to the Dagomba and Gonja in remote spots in the bush by a group referred to as 'Muslim foreign nationals'. During the war Konkomba

claimed to have confiscated a truck-load of modern weapons meant to supply the Dagomba on the front lines, and shortly after the war the Dagomba reported that a truckload of munitions passing through Yendi and Konkomba-land had disappeared. Even into the late 1990s there were claims and counter claims of caches of weapons being misappropriated.

Rumors aside, it is a verifiable fact that more small arms (Aning & Florquin, 2004; IRIN, 2004) are available and this has drastically changed the nature of war. Weaponry and a newfound unity have made the minorities more than a match for the chiefly groups. The new elites continue to look toward the governmental forces to back their interests, which leads us to the fourth characteristic.

#### 4. THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY

The fourth characteristic is the role Ghana's armed forces play in keeping the peace. The military at Kamina barracks in Tamale were confined to their barracks during the first four weeks of the war. By then the jihad to end the minorities had been fully launched and tremendous damage had been done. Thousands of minorities had already been slaughtered in Tamale, Yendi, Salaga, and at checkpoints along the main north-south road. The bridges at Buipe and Yapei were bathed in their blood. Their houses were burnt and belongings stolen. Thousands of armed Dagomba youth had been sent in scores of open articulated trucks to the battle grounds east of Zan, but sadly, most never returned. By then the minorities were winning.<sup>18</sup>

When the army finally did make their appearance it was both violent and dramatically one-sided. Brutal attacks<sup>19</sup> on women and children in Konkomba and Nawuri villages ended in the slaughter of even more innocent civilians, and the plundering of village food supplies and livestock insured that many more would die slowly. The army saw their role as punitive. None of the chiefly cities, villages or peoples were attacked, and when soldiers shot into a mob of Dagomba youth who were about to loot a Tamale bank, in March of '94, the elite warlords demanded and received damages. As one army commander later explained to me, they had been briefed that the Konkombas were the aggressors, the troublemakers from Togo and violent animals who had to be subdued without mercy. This echoes the British colonial policy toward such outbreaks. The old apparatus is still there but the effects of such punishment are now quite different. The response of the government forces has both angered the minorities and taught them that they cannot trust the government to be impartial.

As a result of the conflict the government lost the support of both sides and outside democratic observers as well. Just weeks before the conflict started, President Rawlings alienated the Dagomba during a meeting at Education Ridge in Tamale by an impassioned speech denouncing the oppression of the minorities. Dagomba claim that at the beginning of the conflict the government did not react immediately in order let the Konkomba defeat the Dagomba and establish themselves in Yendi, *fait accomplis*. But this has the sound of disinformation. Yendi was never attacked and, as we have already mentioned, the army later intervened quite violently against the Konkomba. The Dagomba say Rawlings changed when he saw the destruction caused by the Konkomba at Bimbilla and their deception outside Salaga when some soldiers were killed in an ambush. The Konkomba, on the other hand, claim that this ambush was unintended; they hadn't expected the soldiers. Rawlings made no apologies for the behavior of the military and warned the Konkomba of even more

severe reprisals ðnext timeö. But if anything can be learned from past experience, it is that such threats do not deter the Konkomba and, at any rate, such a deterrent strategy may no longer be appropriate given the levels of escalation and the fact that the government was perceived by both parties as helping their enemy.

Attacking the military was certainly quite outside Konkomba objectives. It is noteworthy that although numerous occasions presented themselves for ðminoritiesö to fight the army in 1994 they always stood down. They never fought the army, even to protect their homes and families. The Dagomba town of Zabzugu, for example, was attacked by the Konkomba on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1994, and it is said that the government troops guarding the place repulsed them. The Konkomba, however, maintain that they had made a deal with the soldiers that they would attack during the night and be gone by dawn. The soldiers agreed saying that if they were still there by first light the army would open fire. In fact it was attacked in the early hours of the morning before dawn without any resistance from the army. A much more dramatic incident, however, occurred which may signal major changes in the Konkomba passivity toward the government forces.

One of the most serious outcomes of the war was that the ðminoritiesö have now discovered that they can fight the army with some success. In May 1996, after things had cooled down considerably but still in ðwartimeö by Konkomba standards because there had never been a ritual conclusion<sup>20</sup> to the affair, a battle occurred between the Komba and government forces northeast of Gushiegu in which a number of armored vehicles and an undisclosed number of crack jungle warfare troops were defeated when they were sent in to deter local Komba ðtroublemakersö. The story the Komba give is that they traced their cattle which were stolen during the war, to Patinga, a nearby Dagomba town, and asked the chief to return them. When the chief refused, they sought police help but the police ðran awayö (as they normally do in conflict cases). In spite of threats from the Komba, the Dagomba chief remained obstinate. So, true to the rules of self-help, after having given notice, the Komba attacked the village and retrieved their property. Then, in reprisal, the army destroyed three Komba villages. But on their way to destroy a fourth they were ambushed and an intense fire-fight ensued in which the soldiers were killed and their vehicles destroyed. No mention of this incident ever reached the press. But every ðminorityö knows the story well.

Does this battle signal a new approach by the ðminorityö group leaders toward what they perceive as unlawful molestation and misuse of force by the elites? The ðminorityö group leaders feel strongly that they should be able to protect themselves against what they consider to be unlawful use of force. Now, unless the force is overwhelming, punitive measures are likely to meet with strong resistance. This means that when the next war occurs not only will it involve all the ðminoritiesö of the North but also they will not hesitate to fight the army if they are fired uponö which is very likely because the army will be called upon to uphold the status-quo and law as it now stands. This is a very serious situation, indeed, for it means the next war may quickly degenerate into a full-scale civil war involving the whole North and the Ghanaian army. One could go even further to speculate what this would mean in terms of divisions within the army whose ranks are heavily dependent on the ðminoritiesö, and finally in terms of north-south political divisions and alliances, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. Since their credibility is at stake, before all else,

the government and the army must do all that they can to re-establish trust with the minorities. Up until now this has not been done.

##### 5. THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CONFLICT

A fifth characteristic is the international dimension. In our global arena, what happens in Africa affects what happens elsewhere and *vice-versa*. Outside interests are playing ever greater and more active parts in local politics. As was mentioned above, Ghana is in many ways a test case for democracy in Africa. Since the 1949 war Liberia, Sierra Leone, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Somalia and Sudan have succumbed leaving Ghana as one of the few the working models for democratization and capitalistic enterprise in Africa. The West needs democracy to succeed in Africa, and they are counting on Ghana. But the conflict and its aftermath have indicated that all is not well. From the Western perspective, if democracy is truly to succeed, the process of governing must involve all the people—the minorities as well as the chiefly peoples. This puts the Ghanaian government in a very awkward situation. Politicians are pressured to encourage a democratic process while they know that these very processes might sabotage their backing from the northern chiefs and political elites, might bring about more conflicts and thereby undermine outside support.

One of the more worrisome answers to this dilemma has been provided by the northern political elites in accessing the less than democratic support of a number of Islamic states, such as Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iran, which, since the mid-80s, have taken on a high-profile missionary interest in northern Ghana. This seems to be moving toward the guided evolution of the traditional state system toward what is effectually a northern semi-autonomous Islamic sub-state within the Republic of Ghana. Southerners already strongly believe that the North is Muslim and Islamic propaganda is reinforcing this.<sup>21</sup> But, besides the obvious problems it has with democratization, politically one can also foresee big problems from the minorities and from the Christians of both groups. More on this subject below under the religious factor.

Another international political area of concern is Ghana's relationship with her neighbors. Relations with neighboring Togo were strained in the past. While Rawlings was in power Dagombas speculated that Eyedema, the president of Togo, might stand to gain by secretly arming and training Konkombas, who are closely related to Eyedema's own ethnic group, the Kabre, in order to get back at Rawlings for harboring his archrival Olympio, but this is far from realistic<sup>22</sup> and in any case, with the advent of the NPP, relations with Togo have improved. A far greater threat was hinted at in the north-south conflict that has risen in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire. Besides the very real danger of small arms filtering across the borders, the north-south differences are perhaps even more pronounced in Ghana, where peoples of the North have far more in common with peoples of northern Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and northern Togo, than they have with their former slave masters in southern Ghana.

Africans are now discovering new identities and are forming new links that extend well beyond their regions. In the backwaters of northern Ghana the procedure has been especially slow. Education and literacy are foundational to the process and its advance has been greatly accelerated by outside forces for democratization. But if some forces tend toward the destruction of the old form of traditional state there are others militating toward the formation of a new kind of state with traditional roots.

## 6. LACK OF A RITUAL RESOLUTION

Fortes maintained that ritual kept the violence from degenerating into complete chaos. But the 04 conflict was characterized by a distinct lack of religious re-integration. The sixth characteristic of this conflict, therefore, is the inability of those involved to rectify the situation ritually. Apart from a sham ritual at Salaga, there has never been a formal ritual reconciliation.

The first problem is the sheer geographical extent of the conflict. In the past localized conflicts were resolved at local Earth shrines by the designated traditional Earth shrine custodians. But the 04 conflict covered the entire Northern Region and thus it involved hundreds of Earth shrines. If there are to be rituals how are they to be organized? What is the nature of these rituals? There simply is no precedent for this. In addition to this, the very role of the ritual 0landowner0 was contested. In order to substantiate their claims to land ownership chiefly groups are now claiming ritual authority in places where traditionally it had been accepted that the 0minorities0 were the custodians of the Earth. The official government sponsored rites conducted at Salaga three years after the war were a political show of such chiefly ritual jurisdiction. They were not to bring life back to the Earth. Thus the majority of people, especially the subsistence farmers and the 0minorities0, did not accept them as authentic rituals of peace.

Without any ritual of reconciliation, regarded as authentic in the eyes of the people, there is no peace, the Earth will remain dead, unproductive, unable to sustain life. Only drought, famine and discord will follow. Some point to the drought that the North has been experiencing, which has resulted in the gradual drying up of the Volta lake and subsequent electricity shortages beginning in 2006, as a direct result of this.

## A SUMMARY OF THE DIFFERING CHARACTERISTICS

These six changing conflict characteristics have helped us to focus more closely on the issues and the nature of the opposition between the chiefly elites and the 0minorities0. We have seen that there are enormous differences between what is happening now and what pertained in the past. In the past the possibilities of wars of grievance based on self-help were limited to skirmishes involving limited numbers and primitive weapons; what we see before us now is potentially cataclysmic. It is Ghana's agricultural future that is at stake and the ethnic north-south divide can easily push Ghana into a civil war as it has done in Cote d'Ivoire. In terms of democratization, the 0minorities0 are fighting neo-colonial vested interests and institutions for the independence never granted them fifty years ago, while the chiefs are fighting for the continuance of the traditional state and their elite politicians are establishing a new apparatus of patronage for what they feel is 0their right to rule0. A heavy handed response from the military next time will likely be met with a full armed response. Finally, in the minds of the people the North is still in a state of unresolved conflict, in other words, in a state of discord which renders the very Earth itself a dangerous inhospitable place of droughts and famines.

The present government is caught in a dilemma. They are as dependent on these traditional institutions for the workings of their own political machinery as are the chiefs and elites. But, like it or not, the conflicts have caught the attention of the Western world and Ghana's dependence on Western support means the government



must talk the talk of democratization but walk the walk of the chiefs and elites. Understandably, the government's own peace initiative has not advanced very far. NGOs have made more progress. Both sides are talking, even laughing. Both have agreed to nip any localized outbreak of violence in the bud before it can build up, and they are complying with this for their own safety. But all realize that the agreement to give the minorities their own paramount chiefs is an act of political deception, for what is given is still under the authority of the giver. The minorities will not stop until they have co-equal paramount chiefs.<sup>23</sup>

Minority leaders have learned that war is tough but it pays dividends. It gained them a hearing on the question of their own paramount chieftaincies as well as greater representation in Parliament and in the political process. For them it was justifiable and they see it as a beginning. None are satisfied with the new chieftaincies, which are still under the authority of their former chiefs. So their commitment to the present fragile peace is conditional. Their insistence on co-equal chiefs amounts to a fundamental restructuring of northern politics. As of now this is simply unacceptable to most of the chiefs and elites, so this, in turn, compromises their commitment to peace. Yet, if their demands are not met eventually, all the minority leaders I spoke with agreed that there will be another war.

### III. THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR

Changes in the politics of religion closely entwined with the formation of ethnic identities constitute a third important factor. It is only in the period following independence that we begin to see any appreciable clarification of ethnic identities. Only gradually did the various forms of extortion ranging from levies of yams (see Tait, 1961) and other foodstuffs to inappropriate judgments and unlawful demands arising from the traditional chiefly court system (see Skalnik, 1985) come to be perceived as inequalities and injustices. In colonial times this was simply the way it was. It was all part of the system and there was no recourse.

The changes and the new awareness or getting your eyes opened, came about primarily through education and literacy. In the North the British suppressed the education of the masses and promoted Islam in order to stall development. They were only interested in educating the elites, the princes, especially the sons of senior chiefs who might one day become senior chiefs themselves. But in the 50s mission schools opened their classrooms to all including both chiefly commoners and non-chiefly peoples. The government followed suit in the 60s with Nkrumah's compulsory education program offered freely to all. Schools expanded enormously and education gave the present leaders of the minority groups their political grounding.

Thus those most responsible for disturbing the Pax Britannica were the missionaries with their schools, literacy projects and Bible translation. As the Gutenberg Bible united the Germanic peoples linguistically and culturally so did the Konkomba Bible unite the Konkomba. The completion of the Konkomba Bible, which occurred the very year of the conflict, did more to unite these disparate peoples than the whole series of conflicts. Since it was produced in the Bi-Tchabob dialect spoken around Saboba, an area which had the dubious distinction of having the first police station in Konkomba-land, this area has now been more positively confirmed as the political capital of the Konkomba.

## THE CHRISTIAN FACTOR

On a more philosophical level, among both the chiefly and non-chiefly peoples, the Christian churches were also involved in transforming the process of traditional state formation among the uneducated masses by offering a non-Islamic alternative access to the ðSky-Godö, the overarching theological blueprint for higher political integration. Political unity among the clan-based non-chiefly territorial groups could only be possible in the African context with the advent of new unifying myths, rituals and the belief in an overarching High God. The belief that we are all equal in the eyes of God is as foundational for African democracies as it was for the American.

From the 1950s onward the influx of Christian missionaries began to fill the educational gap. Although, on average less than 5% of northerners are formally Christian, the increased presence of Christian institutions, schools, clinics etc., has created a situation among traditional believers where an overarching creator God has now been brought much closer into the nexus of human problem solving than was formerly the case. The impact of this can easily be missed by Westerners who are used to thinking in dualistic terms separating religious belief from social and political action. But for Africans, appeal to God is eminently practical. It offers an additional option to problem-solving that was not available to earlier generations (see Kirby, 1992c).

I have spoken of the importance of this problem-solving phenomenon, as demonstrated in Islam, for the success of development in northern Ghana (Kirby, 1992a) but it also promotes political and economic liberation. Christian institutions went even further than those of Islam in laying the religious foundations for important worldview changes such as the future perspective for preventative action and diagnostic planning, the psychological changes necessary for taking charge of one's own destiny, an individualist perspective to encourage entrepreneurs, and the trans-tribal political organization needed for broader social unities (Kirby, 1992c). Islam had long provided these at a more rudimentary level for the ðnoble estatesö. Now the Christian God has become the ðAllahö of the acephalous peoples and chiefly commoners, whether they are baptized or not.

But it should be pointed out that the missionary churches also broke into the political consciousness of the chiefly peoples. Although Christianity is usually associated with the non-chiefly peoples, the actual percentage of Konkomba who are Christian is actually about the same as the percentage of the Dagomba Christians, namely 3%. The Dagomba Bible was launched only this year (2007) even though Christianity has slowly been raising new awareness among Dagomba commoners (see Boi-Nai & Kirby, 1998) by offering them access to a Western trans-territorial God ensconced in a more egalitarian process of state formation since the 1950s.

Thus, apart from any religious convictions brought about by a -faith conversionø the very presence of Christianity has offered northern peoples as a whole the philosophical groundwork for appropriating a Western model of democratic representation and political power. The churches have broadened awareness, expanded technical knowledge and helped cultivate a modern scientific mentality among all northern village peoples. They have also offered more effective medicines, better jobs, more opportunities and the hope for a better life to all (see Kirby, 1992b). They have given long-isolated and economically and politically oppressed peoples of

both groups access to a new identity and prestige through a world-wide religious network.

#### ENTERING THE MODERN WORLD

Ghanaians are cosmopolitan and yearn to take their rightful place in the modern world. They have come to the world's attention through such figures as Nkrumah and Kofi Annan, and they compete for top honors in world events like boxing and football. Furthermore, Ghanaians are everywhere. I would estimate that up to 25% of the total Ghanaian population<sup>24</sup>, including the most gifted and highly educated, are abroad. Through education in mission schools both chiefly and non-chiefly peoples have come to look beyond their village limits to the wider world.

These three combined avenues of enlightenment: education, development and a new openness to the wider world, are called *õgetting your eyes openedõ* in all the local languages of the North whether chiefly or non-chiefly. And together they constitute the most important reason people give for becoming Christian (see Kirby, 1985; Boi-Nai & Kirby, 1998), but the political consequences of this decision are vastly different for each group. The chiefly peoples can and do choose to be Christian or Muslim but the non-chiefly can only choose to be Christian— even if it is in name only. For them Islam is linked to the oppressor but it is through Christianity that their *õeyes have been openedõ*. For them the hope sowed by Christianity is also the seed of resistance. This simple fact dramatically affects political alignments.

The Konkomba and other acephalous peoples are, therefore, characterized by chiefly elites as *õChristianõ* not because of their faith *per se* but because through Christianity and Western influences they have *õgot their eyes openedõ*. Their cultural and political views oppose the old values of chieftaincy (*nam*) and they have a strong desire to move into the modern world, to become educated, and not to be *õbush peopleõ* any more. This is indeed all part of what it is to be a Christian in Ghana today— and this is indeed a threat to the old *nam*. Yet where Christian faith is deep it cannot but also influence action, as it has done in the lives of thousands of chiefly Christians (see Boi-Nai & Kirby, 1998), and this has the power to transform the *nam* toward new values and greater freedoms without factionalism or polarization.

#### RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION

Over the past 25 years, co-extensive with the ethnic conflicts, there has also occurred a dramatic religious polarization. The *õminoritiesõ* have increasingly identified with Christianity and the chiefly peoples with Islam. In the early 1980s a friend commented that her husband, an important chief's son, who had been educated and baptized as a Christian and bore a Christian name alongside his Muslim inherited name, was given the ultimatum by his elite colleagues that he must attend *õFriday mosqueõ* if he wished to go anywhere in politics. External and internal events have made it no longer possible for him or for other elites like him to blend traditional beliefs with Islam or Christianity, as had always been possible for those of noble birth in the past. In northern Ghana, religion has become highly politicized and, from the mid-80s onward, it was no longer possible for chiefs or their elite princely sons to straddle the religious fence.<sup>25</sup>

The polarization has affected the Catholics more than other Christians. On the one hand, the Catholics are highly respected by the Dagomba. They are the most powerful

group of Christians and they value hierarchies and formalities. They offer assistance to everyone and their great efforts especially in the area of medicine, education and development are greatly appreciated. Because of these attractive qualities many chiefly elites, at least before 1990, encouraged their children to attend Catholic schools. But, on the other hand, there are two strong biases against them. (1) The Catholic Church is considered too 'foreign' and (2) it is too influenced by the 'minorities' (see Boi-Nai and Kirby, 1999). The foreign aspect is two-sided: the Dagomba are very proud of their culture and Catholicism seems too Western, too different from their culture. It does not 'respect' their culture enough or offer solutions to their problems, whereas Islam does.

The second bias is even more problematic. From the Dagomba perspective, the Catholic Church seems to be dominated by the 'minorities', especially by the Dagarti speaking peoples.<sup>26</sup> Chiefly peoples often complain that the Church is run by the Dagaaba who are one of their traditional enemies, the peoples they formerly raided and enslaved. With a population approaching 1 million, the Dagaaba, who are 30% Catholic, are the single largest and most powerful ethnic 'minority' group. Due to agricultural migration and bureaucratic jobs they are found everywhere throughout the North and they often form the largest and controlling group in any Catholic community anywhere the North. Thus the Dagomba often complain that Catholic missionaries paid too much attention to the 'minorities'.

Fr. Tom Tryers, a British 'Missionary of Africa' and the first to establish a mission in Tamale in 1945, used to rail against such accusations saying that when he set up schools for the Dagombas, 'they were not interested.' Many chiefly peoples hold that the Church is biased in that it does not give help to them but this is not true. The situation on the ground shows that help is given to all. Nevertheless, especially since the war, it is still a sore point in the Catholic Church's relations with chiefly peoples (see Boi-Nai & Kirby, 1998).

#### THE MUSLIM FACTOR

The end of the Cold War brought about major changes in political alliances worldwide, including Africa. The new balance of power has thrust religion into realms formerly reserved for politics. Competition between the two major world 'religions of the book', Christianity and Islam, for the African masses is now strongly influencing mainstream African politics. The old brand of African international politics which played off the World's two most prominent economic 'isms'—capitalism and communism—is now being replaced by one which opposes the world's two most important philosophical, theological and cultural complexes—the nominally Christian culture of Europe and the Americas, and the Islamic culture of the Middle-East, the Gulf states, north Africa, the Eastern and Western Sudans and much of eastern coastal Africa, the Asian steppes, and the Indian and Malay-Indonesian sub-continent.

At the vanguard of these oppositions are fundamentalisms, simplifications of life which make intolerable everything that is different. Suddenly Islamic culture has become the enemy of Western culture and, *ipso facto*, of its official religion, Christianity. Muslim-Christian confrontations now occur, with ever increasing intensity, throughout the world including places where the two have abided peacefully for millennia. September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 cast down the gauntlet resulting in wars of

attrition in Afghanistan and Iraq. But these wars have only widened the gap and the reverberations are felt throughout Black Africa. Each year hundreds of youth are lured by Gulf states with scholarships to attend Islamic institutions. They leave these incubators of intolerance to return to sow the seeds of violence and turmoil.

In Ghana Muslims are only 15.9% of the population<sup>27</sup>, yet they have great political clout, especially in the North. This is because of popular impressions. Most southerners believe that all northerners are Muslim<sup>28</sup> while, in actuality, most of Ghana's Muslims live in southern cities. The North is still mainly populated by adherents of traditional religions (see Dretke, 1970; 1979; Barker, 1986), and it is rather the Northern leadership who strongly project the Muslim image.

Chiefly systems in West Africa have had access to Islam for a millennium but it is only more recently that the potential for international alliances has come into focus. Rawlings was Ghana's first head of state to seriously consider asking for development aid from Islamic states. Al-Qadafi provided the connection to the Muslim world and official links began with the invitation of the chief Imam of Saudi Arabia for a state visit in 1985. Since then Saudi and Iranian development aid has flowed to Ghana in the form of hundreds of new mosques along the main north-south highway, only-for-Muslims bore-holes and water supplies in zongos, only-for-Muslims schools, and abundant scholarships to Islamic institutions. Before September 11<sup>th</sup> even recruitment centers for al-Qaeda took on the appealing guise of schooling abroad.

In the end the anticipated development money for the northern sector never arrived. But all of this did help to create a new platform for political power at the international level to leverage national support for a Muslim traditional state and their continued control over northern politics.

#### ARAB-IZATION FACTOR

In 1976, when I first arrived in the North, I was introduced to the Ya Na, the supreme traditional authority in the area. I had already lived in the South for some 6 years before coming north and, like all southerners, assumed that most northerners were Muslim. After some polite discussion I asked him how he balanced his Muslim faith with his leadership role. He leaned forward and asked me to repeat my question. I hardly had done so when he burst out in uproarious laughter. Then his elders asked him what he was laughing about so he told them something in Dagbani and they too began to laugh. Then he, the very picture of sobriety, turned to me and said, "Look here young man, no Dagomba chief can ever be a Muslim. And I am the Ya Na, the supreme head of all Dagomba chiefs. How can I be a Muslim? Look over there," he said pointing to three elderly men sitting at the side of the hall against the wall peering at sheaves of manuscripts through very thick glasses. "These are our Muslims. They do our paper work for us. They pray for us. They serve us. How can I be a Muslim?" However, since 1990 all Dagomba chiefs, all Gonja chiefs, indeed all chiefs of the North, say that they are Muslim and that they have always been Muslim.

The new Islamic presence is growing steadily in the North and is especially prominent among chiefs and princes.<sup>29</sup> All of Dagomba and Gonja culture is becoming "Arab-ized" The villages around Tamale that had almost no Muslims 20 years ago are now 40% Muslim. As the chiefly peoples are beginning to identify themselves as Muslims, their traditions are also changing. Old myths and oral histories are being retold from

an Arabic perspective. Arabic names have come to replace traditional names. Muslim schools now require the girls to wear Arabic style dress including headwear, trousers and long tunics, and everything must be approved by the Arab-influenced Imams. Muslim missions to the North have increased. All night *õwazuõ*, or proselytizing sessions, blast from megawatt sound systems in the main cities of the North on almost a weekly basis. For such missions *õdevelopmentõ* means becoming Muslim, and the only true Muslim is Arab. And the fact that the name of the development outreach project of the Iranian embassy in northern Ghana is called *õJihad houseõ* leaves no doubt about their militant intentions.

The increase in politically motivated religious polarization that is occurring between Muslims and Christians, as well as chiefly and non-chiefly peoples, in northern Ghana today is especially destructive of peace and justice. It is also harmful to the cause of freedom and democratization. As new sets of myths and shared symbols are formed, new cultural unities arise. Then these begin to set a tone of paranoia for interpreting the actions and intentions of others. Religious institutions, even more than others because of their foundational nature, tend toward dogmatism. Issues easily get reduced to *black and white* and biased judgments lead to further polarization. Suddenly all Christians are suspected by the chiefly peoples because they have come to represent a cultural ethos that seems inimical to the old concepts of chieftaincy (*nam*) and all Muslims are suspected by *õminoritiesõ* because Islam seems to have aligned itself with the traditional state.

#### ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TOWARD A NEW *NAM*

It is quite necessary, therefore, to distinguish carefully between nominal Christians and those whose deeper faith commitment leads to a genuine Christian life. This is true of course for both chiefly and non-chiefly peoples. For example, most KOYA<sup>30</sup> leaders are only nominally Christian, and they did fight in the war, but none of the strongly committed Dagomba Christian prayer group leaders of the village-based small Christian communities around Tamale fought in the war because they said their beliefs convinced them it was wrong to do so (Boi-Nai & Kirby, 1998).

The Catholic Church's emphasis on the democratic process has affected the youth of both groups by helping them to create other paths to power through individual striving and merit, personal initiative and popular local involvement. Christian youth are integral to all the *õyouth associationsõ* (KOYA, DAYA, GOYA)<sup>31</sup> and help them to seek alternative lines of power and authority, to work together toward development, to develop new approaches to land tenure and to help solve their contemporary problems together. Christians, whether from the chiefly groups or *õminoritiesõ*, also play a very important role in local development projects and literacy programs. These commonalities and venues of cross-networking offer brighter hopes for a peaceful future (see Boi-Nai and Kirby, 1999).

Finally, still on the subject of forming a new kind of chieftaincy, one cannot speak of the war without also relating stories of great heroism and humanity on both sides. During the conflict, Christian missions were at risk in all the major cities and towns of the chiefly groups, including Tamale. Many institutions were attacked and ransacked or destroyed. But chiefs and prominent Muslim leaders frequently intervened to save the lives of missionaries<sup>32</sup>. In Yendi the Catholic mission was burned and looted. But this was an exception.<sup>33</sup> The Catholic mission at Bimbilla gave asylum alternately to

the Konkomba and then to the Nanumba as one group overcame the other in turns. Many Christian Dagomba around the Tamale area risked their lives during the war by harboring Konkomba when angry mobs were searching for them from house to house. The same thing happened in areas controlled by the Konkomba. The Konkomba chief of Saboba rescued some Dagomba children by carrying them across the Oti river to Togo in the dead of the night. This kind of commitment to humanity also offers great hope for a new culture of peace, a new kind of *nam*.

#### TOWARD A RITUAL RESOLUTION

The Catholic Church at Yendi had been destroyed by Dagomba youth acting on their own authority in the first weeks of the war, and for the next four years the Church was inactive. Then, on Sunday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1997, the Church, which was earmarked to be a new diocese already before the war, was reopened amid grand celebrations witnessing the mutual participation of the Archbishop of Tamale, representatives from the Ya Na and other chiefs of the Region, as well as the Northern Regional Secretary, Konkomba Christians and KOYA representatives. Two years later Yendi received its first bishop, monsignor Vincent Boi-Nai, who has from that time to the present been extremely active in an on-going inter- and intra-ethnic peacebuilding process.

We have already mentioned the absence of any broadly recognized ritual resolution to the war. Traditionally the ritual of the *õburying* of the blood $\ddot{o}$  is performed to *õcoolõ* the Earth after human blood is shed. But there was no ritual precedent for such a broad based conflict. Who could possibly act as the ritual leader in such a situation? In the African traditional problem-solving mentality (see Kirby, 1986), such a widespread *õproblemõ* is the domain of the sky-God and therefore the obligation of those ritual authorities who claim access to God, including both Christians and Muslims. Can Fortes $\ddot{o}$  equilibrium model be stretched to a broader level of ritual resolution? And could the reopening of the Catholic Church not constitute part of the new type of ritual harmonization needed to put an end to broad based conflict and lead to another level of peaceful coexistence?

Although a complete integration would certainly require ritual authorities from all sides including the Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists, this was initially and very tentatively achieved at this reopening and blessing. Words of encouragement flowed freely from all sides and war of any kind was denounced by all before the high God of the Christians, the Muslims and the Traditionalists. There were no hidden agendas about land ownership such as those beneath the government sponsored public reconciliation ritual which was held at Salaga. This rite of atonement was well received by all and it shared a common ground of belief. In a very real sense, then, it acted to re-establish the equilibrium needed for the continuance of life. It has now been ten years since the Catholic mission reopened and the fact that peace has been maintained, that the earth has produced and that life has gone on, testifies, at least according to the beliefs of many, that the Earth has been healed and life has returned. Some might say that a state of war no longer exists.

#### IV. THE LAND FACTOR

Land tenure in the North is the fourth major factor of change. The chiefly peoples speak of themselves as *õlandlordsõ*. They say, *õThe land is for usõ*. The *õminorityõ* peoples, in turn, say, *õwe are the people of the Earthõ*. They say the land is their heritage. Then, who is right? In a sense they are both right, and in another sense

neither is right. To see our way clear we must first distinguish between the offices of ritual authority, and temporal or political authority.

The claim of the Dagomba and Gonja that they are the *ōlandownersö* or that *ōthe land is for usö* is sometimes translated by the word *ōnamö* (chieftaincy or secular authority) and at other times by the word *ōtindanaö* (ritual authority). In the past, neither of these terms ever meant *ōownershipö*, in the Western sense, over private property. But this is what is being meant by the chiefly peoples today. On the contrary, the concept of *nam* hinged on political power which was exercised by the use of force, usually through superior military tactics and technology (see Skalnik, 1989 and Goody, 1971), and *tindana* focused on ritual custody of a particular *ōEarth spiritö* which governed the life forces within a particular territory.

There was an early attempt to combine the offices of Earth priest and chief in Western Dagbon. *ōThese traditions (drum histories) agree in that the first arrivals of these chief-families seized and slew the tindana of the land and thus came to them their over lordshipö* (Cardinal, 1920: 16). Here the office of ritual headship was assumed by the invaders who slew the original *tindana* and usurped their functions. But, although the chiefly peoples say, *ōthe land is for usö*, they have never been *ōlandlordsö* in the Western or even feudal meaning of the word. According to Goody (1971: 31), West African *ōlandlordsö* were *ōlords of the landö* or chiefs of traditional states who depended on raiding for food and resources. *ōPolitically, chiefs tended to be over people rather than over land: these a leader had to try to attract as well as restrainö* (Goody, 1971: 30). This sometimes led to slavery rather than serfdom. Chiefly centers like Kpembe near Salaga had *ōslave villagesö* attached to them which kept them supplied (see Goody, 1971: 30 fn. 20). Thus, until very recently, land was not viewed as a purely economic or political commodity. In a similar vein Skalnik tells us that *ō. . . the jurisdiction of any ruler over his territory did not imply ownership of land. His authority was viewed only in terms of political (i.e. organizational), moral, and ideological authorityö* (1983).

The *tindana*, on the other hand, were and still are the intermediaries between the visible and invisible worlds. The colonial anthropologist, A.W. Cardinal, saw a *ōprimacyö* in the office of *tindana* as relating to farming matters and day-to-day living on the land. This primacy extended even to the Ya Na himself.<sup>34</sup> He goes on to say: *ōThe distinction therefore, is an important one between a tindana and a naba. The former cares for the religious observances of the people. The latter was in the process of developing into a political head when the advent of the white man interfered with and accelerated the slow process of evolutionö* (Cardinal, 1920: 21).

Contrary to what we see today at the Northern House of Chiefs, traditionally chiefs did not allocate land in the North.<sup>35</sup> H.A. Blair, a colonial D.C. in Dagbon, was quoted as saying: *ōRight of control is vested in the Ya Na, for the decision of boundary dispute between chiefs, but not for the apportionment of land outside Yendi sub-division. Similarly sub-divisional chiefs have no right to apportion land to persons except within their own towns . . . The chief does not grant farming land to individuals. He is considered not to have any right over farms . . . Tindamba still have power over chiefs and are fearedö* (Staniland [1975: 16] quoting from Assistant D.C., Dagomba, to D.C., Dagomba, 13 Aug. 1936 [N.A.G.T., ADM 2/15]).



Nowadays these concepts have changed considerably. The primacy of the *tindana* in distribution of land to farmers only applies far in the bush, away from district and regional centers where the chief claims this right. In the towns and cities where land is now sought for building, commerce or industry, particularly the development industry, it is the regional governmental bureaucracies and chiefs that count. Every land document must be signed by the chiefs of the locale and ultimately by the Ya Na, and very large sums can pass hands. None of this is done by the force of law but of custom and as we have seen, even that is without historical precedent.

The key to understanding this transition is the conceptual shift from land as the patrimony of the ancestors, to land as people (who could be coerced by superior weaponry and force). Coercive power is now being exercised, not with the cavalry of raiders but through governmental bureaucracies over which chiefs and elite politicians exercise a disproportionately strong influence tacitly backed by the government in the absence of any official land tenure policy.

Force is also being exercised by the minorities for their own political and economic gains. The minorities are not simply after their own political autonomy. They also want good farmland. In 1995 the Konkomba returned to settlements dispersed throughout the rich farmlands of northern Brong-Ahafo and Asante Regions rather than go back to their worn out traditional homelands. Now the Guan minorities have their own chiefs and, in the trans-Oti territories of northern Volta Region around Damanko<sup>36</sup>, now they are demanding rents from the migrant Konkomba farmers thus causing new tensions. It is clear that, in the absence of any official governmental policies for land tenure and land tenancy, quarrels will continue unabated.

The policies of the past offer little guidance in this area. Land was not a scarce resource in pre-colonial northern Ghana, but rather human and material booty was. Goody says, "under such conditions neither individuals nor kin groups bother to lay specific claims to large tracts of territory, since land is virtually a free good" (Goody, 1971: 29), and "... ties of subordination rose not out of shortage of land but as the result of purchase or conquest, thus giving rise to slavery rather than to serfdom" (1971: 31). The pay-off was in human booty, captives to be sold as slaves. The chiefly peoples, especially the Dagomba and Gonja, owned and strictly controlled the horses and weaponry, the means of destruction. It is because of raiding that the Konkomba homeland is now on the infertile Oti plain which is noted for its flooding each year precisely during the growing season. "Because such acephalous peoples (as Grunshi, Konkomba, Dagaaba and Talensi) were regarded as pools of manpower and could do little to resist the incursions of their centralized neighbors, they tended to occupy land which was difficult of access, especially to horses" (Goody, 1971: 57). Some straddled across a major river, like the LoDagaa and the Konkomba (Goody, 1971: 57). Nowadays, of course, land has become a valuable commodity, and both the farmers and their former raiders are laying claim to it.

There are a host of other issues cluttering the path to an equitable policy. Perhaps it could have been done with greater ease in the colonial period. That is moot. But now walls of religion and ethnicity barricade access. There is the question of ethnic pride and a host of cultural biases based on centuries of subjugation. One senses the depth of the problem in subtle events. Riding in a low carriage saloon car of a Dagaaba friend on the outskirts of Tamale I experienced a series of exhaust-pipe-destroying

speed bumps constructed out of unbidden civic pride by local Dagomba youths. Passing by I noticed that the boys seemed to be enjoying our discomfort but I couldn't make out their words spoken in Dagbani. My host filled me in: "So you think you are special? You are our slaves!" For the poor and oppressed respect is quite important even if it is minimal. One of the minority groups that is actually a chiefly people, the Anufo<sup>37</sup>, made it known in the heat of the conflict that they are a chiefly people, in spite of the fact that they had very little to gain from this politically, and it was actually quite dangerous because they were literally surrounded by the Konkomba. These basic feelings related to identity and respect are especially important in times of war and when the traditional ways of showing respect are ignored by statements like, "The land is for us!" or "You are our slaves!"

#### WHERE TO NOW?

In this essay we have focused on Ghana's northern ethnic conflicts. We have tried to discern the broad outlines of what might be needed for a more peaceful democratic process for Ghana and, hopefully, of what could be done in other parts of Africa. The picture is not rosy. Ghana's North has been strongly polarized into two camps, the chiefly and non-chiefly groups. According to the current norms with regard to northern land tenure, the chiefs own the land and, thus, have the right to distribute, tax and control the land. Thus the traditional farmers, especially the non-chiefly peoples, who live on the land and produce Ghana's food, wish to have their own chiefs so that they may have access to their own land. This has been blocked by those holding power, namely the chiefs and the political elites who are, in most cases, princes or sons of chiefs. A series of wars, culminating in the 1994 conflict, have been waged between these two mega-groupings to change this. The chiefly groups want to have unchallenged control of northern lands and the northern political process. The non-chiefly peoples want to be liberated from these political controls and to have free access to their own lands and livelihood.

The war resulted in thousands of deaths and hundreds of thousands of refugees, and almost tipped the scales to all-out civil war. Both parties are now fully acquainted with the horrors of war and will not make a choice for war lightly, so any local flare up is quickly doused by specially trained intermediaries. In the aftermath there were many genuine and praiseworthy attempts at bringing about a lasting peace. But thus far none of these efforts have fully succeeded. Neither the government nor any of the NGO consortia have been able to address the deeper issues and bring about a definitive peace or a peace culture. There is a great need, therefore, to exercise legitimate pressures on the government to take appropriate action to foster a new higher level of equilibrium instead of division, and, above all else, to devise a land-tenure system that is equitable and acceptable to the majority—those without power or land, especially the youth, on both sides. The power of some irresponsible chiefs and unscrupulous elite politicians, particularly those who assumed the position of warlords during the conflict, must be checked along with warmongering by each side. And above all, the dangerous trend to establish a Muslim sub-state in the North must be stopped before it leads to more violence and destruction.

A note of caution is also in order. Democratization at present seems to be working only toward the demise of traditional institutions while the Islamic movement and Arab-ization only strengthens them. Can the democratic process begin to build on these traditional roots even as the colonial powers once built on them to serve new

situations and needs? A Western inspired democratization process must not be emphasized to the detriment of a new African basis for equilibrium, a truly African form of democracy. According to Cardinal (1920), if the colonial regime had not interfered, in the *naba* or secular authority would have eventually combined both the political and religious roles, as had already occurred in Asante long before the British arrived. Can the North reconnect with its historical roots and reshape the traditional state into a new form of democracy, a more harmonious balance, a new equilibrium, which does away with minorities, commoners and rulers, leaving just citizens in their place?

We have tried to show that the North cannot do this without a new religious and cultural integration<sup>38</sup>, and, while it is true that the people must do this for themselves, they need inspired leadership who are true statesmen and women of exceptional courage and vision who incorporate the best of their chiefly traditions of genuine service to their people, who are not controlled by the lust for power and who are searching for a healthy new integration.

The process also needs a supporting hand from the international community. Now peacekeeping money is flowing in from almost every corner: DED, GTZ, DFID, USAID, CIDA, UNICEF, as well as many church based organizations. But they each have their own special agendas for peace<sup>39</sup>. It is our view that African cultural institutions must provide the unifying factor. If the Western styled democratizing process itself sets up the conditions for conflict, then other more African institutions and customs need to be encouraged to mediate and resolve them<sup>40</sup>. I have tried to show that it is by supporting and nurturing integrative African institutions, that foreign governments and charitable organizations solicitous of peaceful and just transitions can be most helpful and effective and most loyal to democratization in all its diverse cultural manifestations. It is in the interests of both national and international agencies of development to help manage conflict-prone situations by fostering these. In order to achieve a lasting peace and gain real assurances of stability in the region, a clear understanding of these institutions and issues will be required and some shared responsibility for guiding<sup>41</sup> the process of democratization will be necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> During the 1994 outbreak all the foreign nationals (except for two missionaries), development personnel and volunteers etc., were withdrawn from the North. It took more than three years for some to return. Many returned with Ghanaian operatives. Some never returned.

<sup>2</sup> See Pul (2001) for a detailed description of the work of the various NGOs particularly the NAI (Nairobi Peace Initiative) and its successor in Ghana, WANEP.

<sup>3</sup> The Ghanaian government, which had its information only from the chiefly group members in high office, officially reported less than 3000 dead (counted after major battles) but some independent sources reported that up to seven times this number actually died, (see Katanga, 1994). Konkombas carry away their wounded and many would have died in the bush from wounds gone septic. The NGO consortium estimated that 175,000 persons (mainly from the 'chiefly' groups) were displaced but the actual numbers are almost certainly over 200,000.

<sup>4</sup> There are still no accurate figures for the population of the Konkomba. The 1960 Census put them at 110,000, which was absurdly low due to their inaccessibility living in the deep bush. Barker (1986) estimates them a little more accurately at about 250,000 in 1984. The 2000 Census puts their numbers at 305,575 in the Northern Region alone (Ghana, 2002: 22-33). But when one considers all of the Konkomba sub-groups who were involved including the Bi-Tchabob Konkombas, the Kombas, Gbimbas, Nafiebas and Chambas, as well as those who have migrated the rich farm lands of the Volta Region, and the deep interiors of Asante Region, Brong Ahafo, and East and West Gonja districts and southern cities, their combined numbers would be close to 650,000. If one adds on 133,000 from the other non-chiefly groups of the Northern Region it gives us a total of 783,000 non-chiefly peoples. The 2000 Census (2002: 22-33) records a total of 772,093 easier to locate chiefly peoples in the Northern Region: Dagombas (594,865), Gonjas (131,814) and Nanumbas (45,414).

<sup>5</sup> A few Konkombas, mostly the wives of Gonjas and Dagombas, have quietly returned to Tamale and are keeping a very low profile. Influential Dagombas maintain that only a few Konkomba leaders are not welcome and their lives would not be at risk, but no Konkomba dares to come back.

<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is the author's who was a student of this professor emeritus at Cambridge in the late 70s. On many occasions Fortes railed against what he felt was a too narrow interpretation of his equilibrium models and against what had by then become practically an epithet among the more youthful generation of anthropologists, namely functionalism.

<sup>7</sup> It is axiomatic, following the work of Mary Douglas and Victor in symbolism and ritual, that human experience is the mother of natural or archetypal symbols. Thus the experience of natural human hierarchies (age groups etc.) would have led to symbolic formulations of our relationships with the High God, the Earth divinities, the ancestors, and so on down the hierarchy.

<sup>8</sup> The earliest Gur raiding parties arrived in Ghana from the North around 1200 while the Mande parties which evolved into the Gonja chiefly system arrived from the West around 1500.

<sup>9</sup> The Asante demanded as yearly tribute 2000 slaves and similar quantities of domestic animals and foodstuffs from the Dagomba, and 1000 slaves etc., from the Gonja. For more on Asante over-rule see discussion in Cruickshank (1853; rpr. 1966) and Beecham (1841).

<sup>10</sup> Following comparisons of the 1960 Census figures with the German Census of 1910, the Konkomba population should be much higher today than is reported. Froelich, Alenandre and Cornevin (1963) speak of Komba and Konkomba migrations to Ghana and their assuming of new identities over a generation.

<sup>11</sup> See the author's (1986: 40, footnotes 67 and 68) discussion concerning the Anufo village of Tachieku about which Froelich says, "The people all said that they were Anufo, but they said it in Konkomba" (1954: 251). Today no one there knows a word of Konkomba.

<sup>12</sup> The extent of intermarriage was so great that when the war broke out most Yendi Dagombas didn't know whose side to fight on. There was hardly a person who could claim pure Dagomba heritage.

<sup>13</sup> The more the local women were fed into the system the more chiefs there were with local allegiances.

<sup>14</sup> Different minority groups have gone about seeking recognition in different ways. Unlike the Vaglas, the Mo people gained greater autonomy in Brong Ahafo without a war. But this may not have been possible if the Brongs themselves were not making similar claims against an antiquated Asante overrule and if earlier conflicts against the neighboring Gonjas by Vaglas and Lobis had not paved the way. The Kombas were generally peaceful until the 1994 war when they joined their brothers, the Konkombas. But Konkombas have always been notorious for their violent feuds and vendettas. The Germans in Togoland subdued them by cutting off the thumbs of those caught feuding: a measure intended to limit their use of their lethal poisonous arrows.

<sup>15</sup> I do not mean to minimize the horror of a Konkomba raid. All males including children are slaughtered to minimize vendettas later on. The colonial annals are filled with accounts of Konkombas murdering one another. Nowadays they settle their quarrels in the bush. Two walk in and only one walks out but it is agreed upon by all parties that the police will never come to hear of it.

<sup>16</sup> The Bi-Mobas have amicable relationships with their former despoilers, the Mamprusi, and their feelings against Konkombas were still sharp at this time due to an earlier conflict over land.

<sup>17</sup> The system of *ɔ̄furu*, misleadingly termed dowry, is borrowed from the Hausa and consists in young women striving to bring into their marriage large amounts of property, physical resources commonly termed women's things, which they have built up through their own entrepreneurial initiative, or gifts especially from their mothers and lovers. This inalienable wealth enhances their public role and increases their personal stability and security. But increasingly it makes them susceptible to accusations of witchcraft.

<sup>18</sup> On two occasions rumors that the Konkombas are coming spread like wildfire through Tamale sending thousands running toward the army barracks for safety.

<sup>19</sup> A Catholic priest in the Nawuri area reported many deaths from strafing by government aircraft. Casualties included the son of his catechist who died in his arms from wounds inflicted by aircraft fire.

<sup>20</sup> The ritual is called the burying of the blood. Traditionally it is performed by Earth shrine custodians of the area(s) where the conflict(s) occurred. However, the war covered such a wide area and so many Earth shrines were involved that there has never been a precedent for such a widespread ritual. An attempt was made by the government to have chiefly candidates perform a ritual at Salaga but this simply turned into a fight over who were the proper Earth shrine custodians to perform it. This, after all, was one of the major causes of the conflict to begin with, i.e. who owns the Earth. There is also the belief among all that the Earth knows its master, in other words the rite only works when done by the true Earth priest.

<sup>21</sup> Most diplomatic missions in Accra now erroneously regard Ghana to be 30% Muslim and the North to have a Muslim majority. But the 2000 Census (2002: 26) puts the percentage officially at 15.9% and less than a third of them live in the Northern Region. The Census lists for the Northern Region a total of 1,434,815 Muslims, 518,352 Christians and 580,827 practitioners of traditional religion. But the Muslim figures are probably on the high side and the traditional religion are definitely low. No chiefly person and no educated non-chiefly person wants to be called a traditional religionist, although according to our own survey (Boi-Nai and Kirby 1998) most actually are.

<sup>22</sup> Such speculation was encouraged by Dagomba reports concerning the physical descriptions of the dead after battles. They look like foreigners, the press frequently reported. They were wearing what appears to be combat uniforms, They were equipped with sophisticated weapons or most incredibly, They demonstrated sophisticated tactical maneuvers in combat situations. However, the Togo connection has always been denied by Konkombas, who would have taken it as a point of pride to announce it rather than to deny it, if it were true.

<sup>23</sup> One of the demands has been for a Konkomba paramount chieftaincy at Saboba, the center for the Bi-Tchabob Konkombas. Dagomba leadership has offered to install a chief there but as if to water down his authority have also offered three similar chieftaincies to other Konkomba sub-groups. Konkomba leadership rejects this as divide and conquer tactics and insists that the paramouncy be equal to that of the Dagombas or Gonjas which is mocked by the offer to install. Negotiations have been at a stalemate on this score since they began a decade ago.

<sup>24</sup> This estimate is higher than most in order to account for the fact that so many of them are illegal immigrants.

<sup>25</sup> I do not wish to maintain that Islam is not without its factions. These are quite obvious in Tamale, which is the Muslim center for the North. There are three major factions here: (1) the traditional culture Muslims of central mosque who are largely the elites and bureaucrats with a high level of Western education, (2) the Alfa Ajura ali suna faction which attracts younger, less educated members and is strongly influenced by Wahabi fundamentalism, and (3) a smaller but strongly fundamentalist coalition led by Imam Rashid who have been influenced by the Shiites. There are also the commercial Muslims with Hausa and Yoruba connections although these are not politically significant. The factions effectively limit political controls but having said this, the strongest political force among them by far is Alfa Ajura who once bragged that if he nominated a dog against any political candidate the North could offer, the dog would win one must understand the particular distain with which dogs are held by Muslims to catch his drift.

<sup>26</sup> The presence of the Dagarti ethnic group in the hierarchy, clergy and religious sisters and brothers of the Catholic Church in the North is overwhelming. Due to a mass conversion in the 1930s, as a group they have had an enormous impact on indigenous African Christianity and, because of an early start in education, on the general education, politics and administration of the North.

<sup>27</sup> Ghana (2002: 26).

<sup>28</sup> This is because when northerners go to the southern cities they are forced to stay in the strangers quarters or zongos at the edge of town. Virtually all free northerners who originally settled these zongos were long distance traders in salt and kola nuts, either the Muslim Hausa from northern Nigeria or the Mande, Wangara, Muslim traders from Mali. After the British emancipation of the slaves and the subsequent movement of free northerners to work in southern farms and industries, the newcomers had to settle in the zongos where their Muslim hosts required their conversion as a prerequisite to settlement.

<sup>29</sup> Although there are many differences among the various Muslim missionary groups which include the Sunnis and Shias, they all emphasize the Arab culture.

<sup>30</sup> Konkomba Youth Association

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<sup>31</sup> DAYA = Dagomba Youth Association; GOYA = Gonja Youth Association; KOYA = Konkomba Youth Association.

<sup>32</sup> I might count myself among them. That I and Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies were spared in the 1994 conflict is certainly due to our long time friendship with the Choggu chief.

<sup>33</sup> The Tamale situation is rather special because of the anger that had been building up among the Dagombas who thought that the Catholic missionaries were helping the Konkombas. In the first heat of the war rumors had spread that mission vehicles were used to haul weapons for the Konkombas. This rumor got started because the driver for the Yendi truck was a Konkomba.

<sup>34</sup> Cardinall describes the Ya Na as *dhumbling himself* before the local *tindana* because he *owns* the land and *knows* or is known to the spirit of the land (Cardinall 1920: 21).

<sup>35</sup> Gonjas exacted a *otoll* from farmers of subordinate groups but Dagombas did not do this traditionally.

<sup>36</sup> This almost uninhabited area of rich farmland that has now been settled by Konkombas was traditionally claimed by the chiefly Nanumbas who, in times past, won it from their traditional vassals the Nchumuru. The 1994 conflict effectively ended the control of the Nanumba chiefs, although they still contest this land on traditional grounds against the Nchumuru and three other minority Guan ethnic groups: the Atwode, Challa and Adele. But now the Konkombas have refused to pay the rent demanded by their new landlords the Nchumuru chiefs. So the ownership of this land has been hotly disputed since that time and there have been many incidents including an attack upon the Nkwanta police station in 1997 (cf. *Ghanaian Times* article of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1997).

<sup>37</sup> The Anufo are in the curious position of being a chiefly group that is at the same time a minority because their paramount chief is in Sansanne Mango, Togo. Like the Konkombas, in colonial times they were put under the authority of the Dagomba Ya Na. Although they wish to have their own paramount chief, they would rather go about it politically than through war with their long time enemies, though chiefly brothers, the Dagomba.

<sup>38</sup> I have described (Kirby 2003) and made use of a process for bringing about such a new cultural integration in peacebuilding using a new dramatic format called *oculture drama*.

<sup>39</sup> Lederach (1997) describes a four stage process in peacebuilding but governmental and NGO peace efforts rarely go beyond the second level of building relationships to the all-important third systemic level of building a peace system. This is precisely the area addressed by *oculture-drama* for it seeks to integrate cultural pathways in conflict. Refer to Kirby (2003) for more on the conflicting cultural themes present in the chiefly vs non-chiefly conflict.

<sup>40</sup> In this regard I have made good use of *oculture-drama* (see Kirby 2002), a new enactment genre which offers a way of resolving the conflicting cultural pathways that undergird most ethnic conflicts. Culture-drama enables communities to heal themselves, first by recognizing, then by accepting and coordinating, and finally by integrating various implicit, hidden pathways within a workshop format.

<sup>41</sup> The Nairobi Peace Initiative was more successful than the government-sponsored initiative precisely because the minorities consider the government initiative to be heavily biased in favor of the chiefly groups. Through their efforts a new Konkomba-Dagomba assembly hall has been constructed at Yendi. They planned a massive *durbar* which was intended to re-open Tamale to everyone but because the essential cultural groundwork was never done and the issues never addressed by NPI or any other group the re-integration never happened.