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## “If Nkrumah and the CPP Did Not Come on to the Scene, the Mamprusi-Kusasi Conflict May Not Have Occurred...” Politicization of the Bawku Chieftaincy Conflict

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### **Abstract:**

*The Kusasi-Mamprusi ethnic conflict in Bawku, a border town located in the extreme Northeastern corner of Ghana, which began in 1957, has become protracted. The two main factions in the conflict have clashed four times between 1980 and 2000. The disagreement has been over who should occupy the Bawku skin( a titled chieftaincy position) as Bawkunaba and control the Bawku land, as land ownership is tied to occupancy of the Bawku skin. Scholarly works on conflicts in Northern Ghana, have traced the root causes to the introduction of chieftaincy by the British colonial administration in the area. The policy that amalgamated smaller states with big kingdoms, created a subordinate-master relationship between the Kusasi and Mamprusi. Proponents of colonial government’s complicity argue that attempts by the Mamprusi to maintain the status quo during the post-colonial Ghanaian government, has provoked the recurrent ethnic conflicts between the two groups. Within the context of understanding the historical antecedents of conflicts in Ghana, this paper, situated within a broader historiographical context argues that, though the conflict could be described as a colonial artifact, other dimensions of the phenomenon e.g. the emergence of party politics in the 1950s which polarized the society; the actions and/or inactions of post-colonial Ghanaian governments, in particular Kwame Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (C.P.P.), were major contributory factors that created tensions which led to violent confrontations. The extremepartisan approach adopted by post-colonial governments politicized the conflict and encouraged attempts by the factions to appropriate political space and authority.*

**Keywords:** Mamprusi, Kusasi, Bawku, Conflict, Colonial, Chiefs

### **1. Introduction**

The Mamprusi-Kusasi conflict mirrors the general phenomenon of ethnic tensions and conflicts that has engulfed the African continent in the last fifty years. In West Africa, Ghana is among the few countries thought to be an exception to this canker. But even this image of Ghana as a peaceful country only masks a festering wound of communal violence, inter-ethnic conflicts and armed confrontations in the Northern part of Ghana. The remote or root causes of these conflicts are largely traceable to the introduction of secular political authority/chieftaincy in areas which, before colonialism, were described as stateless or acephalous. However, the actions or inactions of post-colonial Ghanaian governments such as, the interference in chieftaincy matters more than any factor set the stage for the protracted Mamprusi -Kusasi conflict in the commercial border town of Bawku. The security of the entire country has often been compromised by the scope of unrest, wanton loss of lives and property, waste of the nation’s scarce resources and the dislocation of people due to the frequent occurrence of the conflict.

Like most conflicts, the Mamprusi-Kusasi conflict in Bawku is about who occupies the Bawku skin and control the land in the area. The contest for this position has often been between the Kusasi and Mamprusi (the two dominant ethnic groups) in Bawku. The first clash between the two groups occurred in 1957 and between 1980 and 2000 the two groups have clashed five times each time with devastating consequences.

### **2. Theoretical Framework**

Scholars are divided in their discussion of the root causes of inter-ethnic conflicts that occur in Northern Ghana as a result of disputes over succession to a chieftaincy title or office as in the case of the Mamprusi-Kusasi chieftaincy/ethnic conflict. One school of thought traced the genesis of these conflicts to the categorization of societies in that part of the country by anthropologists (Meyer Fortes & Evans Pritchard, 1948:5) and the British colonial administration into acephalous/non-centralized and centralized groups. The other school of thought identifies other factors beyond the colonial enterprise such as the actions and or inactions of post-colonial governments with respect to conflict situations. This paper is situated within the second school of thought and examines the politicization of the Mamprusi-Kusasi chieftaincy/ethnic conflict, within the context of understanding the nuanced causes/sources of conflicts in Northern Ghana. It begins with an overview of the pre-colonial situation in the area as a background and examines the changes made to the pre-colonial political structures of the Mamprusi and Kusasi by British colonial

administration as well as the interventions/interference by post-colonial governments in the conflict. As a historical study, a qualitative methodology was adopted and the data for the write-up was derived predominantly from archival sources, field oral interviews and supplemented with data from relevant published literature.

### 3. Location and Traditions of Settlement

Bawku is located in the north easternmost corner of Ghana. It is a major commercial town and market centre close to two international borders; Togo to the East and Burkina Faso to the North; Benin and Niger are also not too distant from Bawku. By its geographical location and its commercial activities, Bawku has become a polyglot of immigrants from other parts of Ghana and neighboring countries. Economic opportunities, largely commercial activities, have been the catalyst for the presence of immigrants in Bawku. Their presence has made Bawku cosmopolitan and increased its demography overtime, but the Kusasi (autochthones) and the Mamprusi (the warrior new-comers) remained the dominant ethnic groups. The 2000 Population and Housing Census report showed a Kusasi majority followed by the Mamprusi.<sup>1</sup> The Kusasi constitute 75% and 45% of the total population in Bawku west and Bawku East respectively.

At the heart of the Kusasi-Mamprusi conflict was an agglomeration of issues about litigations over allodial rights and chieftancy. Both the Kusasi and the Mamprusi claim allodial ownership of Bawku, claims which are shrouded in their narrative histories of origins and derived from claims of autochthony or first-comership. The Alhassan Committee which investigated land ownership in Northern Ghana in 1978 identified first-comership as one of the bases to claim of land ownership.<sup>2</sup> In Bawku, answers to the question of the first settlers are inconclusive and a matter of controversy. To dissect the question of the first settlers of Bawku, it is imperative to discuss the migration-and-settlement histories of the Mamprusi and the Kusasi. The Mamprusi claimed descent from Na Gbewaa, and traced their origins to Tanga, an area located East of Lake Chad, from where they settled at Pusiga near Bawku where he became chief over the indigenous Gurma and some Kusasi.<sup>3</sup> Here Na Gbewaa died, and his three sons – Tohugo, Sitobu and Mantambu – migrated further afield and founded the Mamprugu, Dagomba and Nanumba, respectively. Mamprusi accounts date their presence in Bawku to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and link it to military assistance they offered the Kusasi during the reign of Na Atabia as Nayiri (1690-1741). Incessant incursions of Bissa into Kusasi territory compelled the Kusasi to seek the military intervention of the Nayiri of the Mamprusi. It is unknown whether any historical links existed between the Kusasi and the Mamprusi before the former sought Mamprusi military assistance in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Suggestions, however, paint a faint picture of the establishment of Kusasi-Mamprusi relations prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> as they give inconclusive indications that the Kusasi lived under Mamprusi suzerainty in Pusiga prior to the Kusasi-Mamprusi military alliance against the Bissa.

In Mamprusi circles, it was this historical ruler-ruled relationship between the Mamprusi and the Kusasi that made Na Atabia, the Nayiri of Mamprugu then, to respond to the Kusasi plea. Mamprusi traditions maintain that Na Atabia responded by establishing security posts in Bawku, Sinnebaga, Binduri, Teshi, Tanga and Worikambo. These posts were administered by Mamprusi garrisoned men or warrior princes who kept safe the trade routes that passed through Kusasi and strengthened the lines of communication between Tenkudugu and Nalerigu. With time the Nayiri appointed Mamprusi princes as chiefs in these places which were predominantly Kusasi settlements.<sup>4</sup> This pre-colonial arrangement secured for the Nayiri the prerogative to install a Mamprusi as Bawkunaba. It is unclear whether this move was part of Na Atabia's drive to expand the Mamprusi kingdom. Nonetheless, the Mamprusi chiefs did not seek to exercise political control over the Kusasi, but seemed to have restricted their leadership roles to their Mamprusi brethren in Bawku and its environs.

Traditions about the Kusasi settlement in Bawku and its neighbourhood are varied. According to R. S. Rattray (1932), however, when the Mamprusi moved from Gambaga into Bawku, the Kusasi were already in occupation of the area as tengdanas. The Kusasi were said to have migrated largely from Biengu, Zawga and Yuiga (currently located in Burkina Faso) and settled mainly in the outskirts of Bawku and engaged in crop farming and animal husbandry. Though there are other ethnic groups such as the Bissa, Moshi, Hausa and B'moba in Bawku, they constitute an insignificant minority who migrated into the area mainly as traders.

### 4. Traditional Political Structures of Mamprusi and Kusasi Societies

In general, scholars, mainly anthropologists, have described the political structures of pre-colonial Northern Ghanaian societies either as centralized or non-centralized (Meyer Fortes & Evans Pritchard, 1948: 5). The centralized political systems refer to those with central authority embodied in chiefs comparable to those in Asante. The non-centralized groups were those that lacked a locus of central political authority and headed by tendanas (land owners or earth priests) who could only invoke spiritual and moral sanctions on wrong doers. The Colonial Administration endorsed this view of pre-colonial structure of Northern Ghanaian societies and proceeded to formulate policies based on that.

The Mamprusi fall within the category of those with centralized authority as they came to Bawku with advanced ideas of chiefship with Nayiri as their overlord. This feature of Mamprusi society pre-dates colonial intrusion. They had a hierarchy of chiefs or 'Na' with the Nayiri as overlord and the tengdanas operating alongside the Na. As secular rulers, the Nayiri, assisted by his sub-chiefs and council of elders enforced law and order through adjudication of cases. The Kusasi, on the other hand, lived acephalous lives and did not acknowledge a centralized political authority headed by one individual as supreme ruler constituting a centre of power that consisted of a court and council of elders, prior to their contact with the Mamprusi and the arrival of the British in

<sup>1</sup> 2000 Population and Housing Census of Ghana: Ghana Statistical Service.

<sup>2</sup> Report of Committee on the Ownership of Lands and Position of Tenants in the Northern and Upper Regions, 1978 chaired by R. I. Alhassan, 47.

<sup>3</sup> Yeremea Mahama (2009), 141.

<sup>4</sup> PRAAD Tamale, NRG 8/2/214, JKGSyme (1932), The Kusasi: A Short History, 22.

Bawku. The societies of these non-chiefly groups were headed by tengdanas (earth priests) who were spiritual leaders and assisted by different clan and family heads. They offered sacrifices to the land gods to secure their sources of livelihood and their authority did not go beyond imposing spiritual and moral sanctions. There were other minor immigrant groups such as the Bissa, Moshi, Hausa and B'moba who came to Bawku as traders (Yeremea, 2009: 143).

In spite of these differences in political organization, the two groups lived peacefully prior to colonial intrusion as the Mamprusi chiefs did not seek to exert political control over the Kusasi. The tengdanas operated alongside the Mamprusi chiefs playing different roles (Rattray, 1932: xv).

### **5. British Colonial Policies and their Impact on Mamprusi-Kusasi Relations**

Some scholars (Ladouceur, 1979) have traced the genesis of the Mamprusi-Kusasi ethnic conflict in Bawku to the British colonial policies in the Northern Territories (coterminous with present day Northern Ghana). In the first place, the Colonial Administration inherited a structure in which land was vested in the hands of chiefs who held it in trust for their subjects.<sup>5</sup> This made land a precious commodity especially as its value appreciated with time. Furthermore, the restructuring of traditional institutions in Northern Ghana by the British Colonial Administration prior to the introduction of the indirect rule system in 1932 which took the form of amalgamating smaller/acephalous ethnic groups with bigger/centralized kingdoms, termed paramountcies and headed by paramount chiefs, eventually created subordinate-master relationships between the bigger states and the smaller non-centralized polities. For example, the amalgamation of the Kusasi and Mamprusi in 1932 created a subordinate-master relationship between the two as the Kusasi were subsumed under the Mamprusi (Ladouceur 1979:56; Lund, 2003:589). The determination by the Mamprusi to maintain this colonial arrangement even after the exit of the British set the stage for persistent tensions that later escalated into conflict.

Other events immediately before and after Ghana's independence also pushed the two groups to the point of violent confrontations/clashes. E.g. The emergence of an educated Kusasi elite and the formation of the Kusasi Youth Movement whose agenda, among other things, was to press for a reform of the traditional governance structure, further heightened the uneasiness within the ranks of the Mamprusi royal elite. From its formation in 1954, the movement used its meetings as a platform to highlight the plight of the Kusasi, especially after 1932,<sup>6</sup> as a politically and socially marginalized group, in order to galvanize Kusasi ethnic solidarity against the perceived enemy, the Mamprusi.

### **6. Party Politics and the Polarization of the Bawku Community**

Political parties began to emerge in the late 1940s with the formation of the United Gold Coast Convention (U.G.C.C.) in 1948 which had Kwame Nkrumah as the general secretary. In August 1949, Nkrumah broke away from the U.G.C.C and formed the Convention People's Party (C.P.P) which identified the interest of the youth as its focus. Eben Adam and R.S. Iddrisu who were both members of the youth wing of the U.G.C.C, led a number of other northerners into the C.P.P.<sup>7</sup> Kwame Nkrumah who was earlier on introduced to prominent Northern chiefs such as the Nayiri by J.B. Danquah, visited the north, this time on a different mission to introduce a new party, the C.P.P to the northern chiefs. He won many more adherents to the C.P.P.

The introduction of these two political parties in the north created divisions and polarized the society, especially in the run up to the 1954 elections. After the emergence of the Northern Peoples Party (N.P.P) in April 1954, Nkrumah's C.P.P. could not count on the support of the Nayiri and by extension, the other chiefs as commanded enormous influence over many of the divisional and sub-divisional chiefs in the Northeastern province. Nkrumah's propaganda henceforth targeted the Nayiri and any chiefs who supported him.<sup>8</sup> The Kusasi exploited the situation to their advantage. ImoroAyarna, AyeeboAsumda, DugunyelliHerbi and other prominent members of the Kusasi Youth Movement threw their support behind the C.P.P.

The emergence of party politics from the late 1940s and the posturing of the Kusasi and Mamprusi deepened the polarization of the Bawku community. Whilst the Mamprusi, with the influence of the Nayiri (Mamprugu overlord), supported the Northern People's Party (NPP) which was seen as a chiefs party, the Kusasi guided by their mostly urban educated elite and influenced by Kwame Nkrumah's ideas of liberation, threw their weight behind the Convention People's Party(C.P.P.). In the run-up to the 1954 elections therefore, the North in general and Bawku community in particular, was deeply polarized on partisan and ethnic lines. It became obvious to Nkrumah and the C.P.P. that the only strategy that could secure political control for them in the Northeast in particular was to systematically undermine the Nayiri and weaken the N.P.P.<sup>9</sup> Consequently the C.P.P. began to infiltrate the satellite Mamprusi "colonies" such as the Frafra and Kusasi areas, by inciting local C.P.P. supporters to initiate calls for secession. The results of the 1954 elections in the Northeast confirmed Nkrumah's fears as the N.P.P. won a majority of the twenty-six (26) seats allocated to the Northern Territories. From 1954 onwards, the Kusasi and Mamprusi became sharply divided on both ethnic and chieftaincy lines. They were divided also on ideological lines. In this way, the KusasiMamprusi conflict reflected both local and national politics. In the post 1954 elections era, the Kusasi became emboldened as Nkrumah intensified his efforts to cut the Nayiri down to size and frustrate the N.P.P. Soon after the 1954 elections, Nkrumah announced plans to create separate Frafra and Kusasi District Councils which would be independent of the Mamprusi District Council.

<sup>5</sup> This structure was also inherited and upheld by post-colonial governments.

<sup>6</sup> They complained of maltreatment by the Mamprusi between 1932 and 1957.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> The British influenced the chiefs not to support the CPP. This compelled Nkrumah and CPP to turn their attention towards the ordinary Ghanaian, i.e. farmers, traders, clerks and generally the youth.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Lund, 589.

### 7. The Death of the Bawkunaba and the Parallel Enskinning of two Chiefs

The C.P.P.'s overwhelming victory in the 1956 General Elections paved the way for the granting of independence to Ghana as a unitary state with Kwame Nkrumah as the prime minister, and Lord Listowel as a ceremonial acting governor general. The implications of Nkrumah's electoral victory and the attainment of independence were quite grave for the Nayiri and the Mamprusi in view of the frosty relations between the Prime Minister and the Nayiri which dates back to 1950 when he rallied some Northern chiefs in an attempt to frustrate the C.P.P. branch in Tamale even before the party could establish itself.<sup>10</sup> This became worse in 1954 when the Nayiri actively campaigned against the C.P.P. by instructing all the divisional and sub-divisional chiefs under him to support the N.P.P.<sup>11</sup> (the rival party). The Nayiri's influence over the chiefs led to the poor showing of the C.P.P. in the North in both the 1954 and 1956 General Elections and in particular, their alliance with the opposition prior to the 1956 Elections set Nkrumah thinking, after independence had been granted.

In December 1956, Bawkunaba Na Awuni, died, creating a vacancy on the Bawku skin. According to IddiWuni, the Kusasi saw it as a perfect opportunity to actualize their aspirations by having an indigenous Kusasienskin as Bawkunaba.<sup>12</sup> This provoked a fierce contest amongst mainly Mamprusi princes from the four gates, for the skin.<sup>13</sup> The front runners included NyorugunabaYerimiahMahama, SagabunabaBelkoAbugri and AbagriBukari.<sup>14</sup> At the end of the contest, the Nayiri(the sole enskinning authority) chose YerimiahMahama as the successor, a decision which provoked protests by the unsuccessful Mamprusi princes. However, before Yeremiah could return to Bawku to undergo the second phase of the enskinment ceremony, the Kusasi Youth Association, Kusasitentanba and their clan heads took advantage of disagreements and protests over the Nayiri's choice of the successor among Mamprusi princes themselves and enskinned AbugragoAzoka (a native Kusasi).

The parallel enskinment of Abugrago Azoka as Bawkunaba in 1957 in defiance of Nayiri's choice of Yerimiah for the same skin (title position), created an imbroglio and precipitated violent clashes between the two ethnic groups.<sup>15</sup> The resultant casualties on both sides as well as destruction of property caused acting governor general, Lord Listowel, in consultation with Nkrumah, to appoint a Committee of Enquiry, chaired by OpokuAfari, to investigate the cause(s) of the clashes and make recommendations.<sup>16</sup> If Nkrumah's lack of decisive action led to the first clash, his subsequent seeming partisan posture towards the factions polarized the entire Bawku community.

The reaction of the Mamprusi to the clashes as well as the committee's findings was predictable. In the first place, the Mamprusi faulted his decision to constitute a Committee of Inquiry, describing it as political or executive interference in what they thought was a purely traditional matter especially as the Nayiri was already initiating steps to resolve the impasse.<sup>17</sup> They accused Nkrumah of being the hidden hand behind the troubles in the Northeast since the formation of the N.P.P. as an opposition party to Nkrumah's C.P.P. Their accusation of bias against Nkrumah and the C.P.P. became intensified when in March 1958, the government extended a formal/official recognition to AbugragoAzoka as Bawkunaba by gazetting his enskinment(making him a paramount chief equal in rank with the Nayiri) even before the findings of the Opoku-Afari Committee were published.<sup>18</sup> In April of that year, someMamprusi headsmen and Mamprusi appointed chiefs in Kusasi area opposed to the C.P.P. were replaced with Kusasi and pro C.P.P. supporters as chiefs, an action which was described as a social or traditional revolution.<sup>19</sup> These politically motivated moves heightened tension between the two ethnic groups throughout the Nkrumah era as prime minister and later president. The strained relations between Nkrumah and the Mamprusi chiefs generally reflected his relations with chiefs in Ghana owing presumably to their opposition to the C.P.P. Hence most scholars on Ghana's political history have often portrayed him and the C.P.P. as being hostile towards chiefs and the chieftaincy institution. The Mamprusi in particular have traced the genesis of the Mamprusi-Kusasi conflict to Nkrumah's anti-chieftaincy posture towards areas in the north that have a strong tradition of chieftaincy.

His highhandedness towards chiefs and politicians who opposed him led to a litany of defections from the N.P.P. to the governing C.P.P. after the 1956 general elections and the declaration of independence. For example, JambaiduAwuni (N.P.P.) MP for Kusasi Central defected to the C.P.P. in August 1957 in the wake of the Bawku skin succession dispute. He blamed the failure of his uncles bid for the skin to the opposition of Mamprusi chiefs to the C.P.P. led by MumuniBawumia.<sup>20</sup> In June 1958, MumuniBawumia himself resigned from the opposition to join the C.P.P. following threats by local C.P.P. members in the Kusasi

<sup>10</sup> Richard Rathbone, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Ladouceur, 119.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with IddiWuni, (Mamprusi opinion leader and retired educationist) in Bawku, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

<sup>13</sup> The four gates in Bawku are Na Mahama, Na Azangbeogo, Na Abugri and Na Yakubu gate. They are all descendants of Na Mamboda.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with IddiWuni, (Mamprusi opinion leader and retired educationist) in Bawku, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

<sup>15</sup> The clashes began first among the Mamprusi princes at the Nayiri's palace in Nalerigu right after the announcement of Yerimiah as Bawkunaba. But fighting became more intense in Bawku and between the Kusasi and Mamprusi when news about the rival enskinment of AbugragoAzoka broke.

<sup>16</sup> The Committee report and the reactions of both factions have been discussed in the earlier part of this chapter

<sup>17</sup> NRG8/2/138, Telegram from Mamprusi state council to the territorial office in Tamale, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1957, Interview with AlhajiSeiduAkaliifah (Mamprusi spokesperson) in Bawku on 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Ghana Government Gazette no. 21, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1958.

<sup>19</sup> Ladouceur, 174.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with BugriNachinaba (Kusasi) Accra, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2011. See also Ladouceur, 168.

and Frafra areas to instigate the deskinment of the Nayiri (Ladouceur, 1979:171). Similar defections and resignations were witnessed elsewhere outside the Kusasi area.<sup>21</sup>

Criticism of Nkrumah and the C.P.P government must however be guided by an informed awareness of Nkrumah's frustration with the chiefs and the limited choices at his disposal. The perceived impatience of Nkrumah and his government towards the chieftaincy institution and some chiefs in particular was not without foundation.<sup>22</sup> Apart from his personal frustration with the chiefs, there were pre-existing tensions and growing agitations against certain traditional rulers by their subjects, the most prominent were found in AkyemAbuakwa,<sup>23</sup> Asante<sup>24</sup> and the Northern Territories.<sup>25</sup> In the particular case of the Nayiri, even before Nkrumah appeared on the political scene in 1950, there had been a number of grievances and complaints by the Kusasi and Frafra youth against him and Bawumia, the Mamprusi State Council's Clerk. The Kusasi were seething with feelings of maltreatment at the hands of Mamprusi royals and Nkrumah sought to exploit these as well as the agitation by the Kusasi educated elite for political advantage especially after the formation of the N.P.P.

The Kusasi Youth Movement and the Kusasi elite had continually criticized the colonial administration and the Nayiri for imposing Mamprusi chiefs on them;<sup>26</sup> and the C.P.P. using Dugunyelle, a Bissa, rallied the Kusasi Youth and elite into action. When Dugunyelle, Secretary of the Kusasi Youth Movement, joined the C.P.P, he mobilized the other members e.g. Imoro Ayarna, AyeeboAsumda into a more formidable force. Their continued agitations culminated in the desired change in June, 1957 with the enskinment of AbuguragoAzoka as Bawkunaba.

Apart from his perceived role in the enskinment of the KusasiBawkunaba in 1957, which led to the clashes, Nkrumah's decision to create the Upper Region in 1960 out of the Northern Region was seen as an attempt to spite the Nayiri. In 1958, Nkrumah carried through his post 1954 elections plan to initiate political reforms with the creation of the two district councils separate from the Mamprusi State Council. Calls for the creation of these two separate district councils had been part of the petition of the Mamprusi princes in 1957, which was only echoed by the Kusasi and Frafra Youth Movements.<sup>27</sup> Local C.P.P. supporters in the Kusasi and Frafra areas had complained particularly about marginalization of the two areas by the Mamprusi State Council in the allocation of funds towards development as well as scholarship awards for further studies. Therefore, Nkrumah could be said to have merely responded to the agitation of the Frafra and Kusasi youth.<sup>28</sup> The Mamprusi nonetheless saw it as yet another move to humiliate the Nayiri.

The creation of the Upper Region in 1960 separated the Kusasi and Frafra traditional councils from the Mamprugu Jurisdiction, weakened the bond between the Nayiri and the chiefs of the erstwhile satellite Mamprusi 'colonies' in Frafra and Kusasi thereby worsening the rift between the Nayiri and Nkrumah.<sup>29</sup> In 1972, the Mamprugu traditional council wrote to invite the Frafra and Kusasi chiefs to a meeting. In his response, the registrar of the Upper Regional House of chiefs reminded the Nayiri that the Frafra and Kusasi districts were outside his jurisdiction:

"As much as I am fully aware of your customary ties with the Frafra and Kusasi traditional council area chiefs, it is also a fact that, those territorial Districts do not fall within the Northern region administrative control... The Upper Regional house of chiefs

<sup>21</sup>T.K.Yetu MP for Frafra East and brother of the Nangodinaba as well as C.K. Tedam, brother of Pagapio both resigned to join the CPP for fear of possible deskinment of their respective patron chiefs haven't earlier been threatened with arrest by agents of Nkrumah's CPP government.

<sup>22</sup>There had been a hang-over of the perception that, chiefs were in league with the imperialists maneuvering to delay the granting of independence owing to the fines they collected at the Native courts/tribunals. Abuses of the tribunal through dubious fines have been a subject of controversy in many parts of the Gold Coast. Again many of the C.P.P activists including Nkrumah and KroboEdusei had no royal descent and hence were in no mood for any compromising relationship with the chiefs. Some chiefs had become unpopular with their subjects. Nkrumah only exploited these pre-existing local grievances against some chiefs to his advantage.

<sup>23</sup>JarleSimensen "Rural Mass Action in the contest of Anti-Colonial protest: The Asafo movement of AkimAbuakwa, Ghana"*Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 8, No 1 (1974), 25-41. In AkyemAbuakwa there was rivalry between the so called commoners(asafocompany) and the traditional elite, over various allegations including misappropriation of stool resources, misuse of power and abuse of the tribunal system through the extortion of exorbitant tribunal fines. Some of the allegations were however fabrications and politically motivated.

<sup>24</sup>Rathbone,22.KroboAdusei who had been punished a number of times by the Native Courts in Asante for opposing the Asantehene, was a ready tool in the hands of Nkrumah who empowered him to challenge traditional authority sometimes with impunity.

<sup>25</sup> Dennis Austin, "Elections in an African Rural Area" *AFRICA:Journal of International African Institute*, Vol.13, No.1(1961)..1-18. Nkrumah usually picked candidates who enjoyed massive support against local anti-C.P.P chiefs and against whom people had grievances. Local rivalries arising out of personal jealousies and age old rivalries between Anafobissi&Abagnabissi lineages in Bongo was used by Nkrumah and his C.P.P candidate for Bongo, W.A. Amoro to their advantage.

<sup>26</sup>Though a Bissa by ethnicity, Dugunyelli's membership of the Kusasi Youth Movement greatly improved their level of activism.

<sup>27</sup>Ladouceur, 124.

<sup>28</sup>The creation of separate Frafra and Kusasi District councils was followed by the creation of separate traditional councils for the two areas. A Committee set up in 1955 to determine whether the intended split was prudent, discouraged the split and the move had to be put in abeyance until 1958.

<sup>29</sup> But some Frafra chiefs still owe allegiance to the Nayiri as a matter of choice. The creation of BrongAhafo Region, from the Asante Region, was also seen as a move by Nkrumah to undermine the Asantehene

is appealing to you to assist it help you maintain your traditional link with chiefs in the Upper Region, though administratively and conveniently, you wholly belong to the Northern Region”<sup>30</sup>

Obviously the Nayiri lost control over Kusasi and some Frafra chiefs as a result of the separation of their district councils in 1958 and the creation of the new region two years later. From 1960 till his overthrow in February, 1966, Nkrumah became increasingly intolerant and high handed in dealing with dissent and his party supporters at the grass roots level took advantage of the situation to become lawless. There were reports of harassment of N.P.P members led by local supporters of the C.P.P in Mamprusi and Kusasi areas. Chiefs who supported the N.P.P were threatened with destoolment. C.P.P members in South Mamprusi led by a group called the ‘South Mamprusi Youth’ continued to fuel resentment against the Nayiri.<sup>31</sup> Parliamentarians who rode on the back of endorsement by certain traditional authorities in the 1956 elections defected in their numbers to the C.P.P to protect such chiefs.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, by 1960 Nkrumah and his government had come to be likened to a beast of uncertain temper that needed to be approached with utmost caution and open opposition to the regime was viewed as shortsighted folly.

On 1<sup>st</sup> August 1962, Nkrumah made a brief stopover at Kulungungu near Bawku while returning from what used to be Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). There he narrowly escaped an assassination attempt as he stepped out of his vehicle. Three of his close associates namely, Tawia Adamafo, Ako Adjei and Coffie Crabbe were arrested and detained on grounds of suspicion of having orchestrated the attempted assassination.<sup>33</sup> Though Nkrumah survived the attack, one life was lost and several others were injured.<sup>34</sup> At the local level, some relatives of Yeremiah, the Mamprusi prince in Bawku and a number of Mamprusi opinion leaders who were declared prime suspects were forced into exile in Burkina Faso. This incident worsened the already strained relations between Mamprusi and Nkrumah and the C.P.P.

## 8. Conclusion

In examining the root causes of conflicts in Africa and Ghana, the temptation exists for some scholars to view the phenomenon as a British Colonial artifact. Available evidence however, suggests that several other nuanced factors such as the actions and or inactions of Post Independent governments largely led to or aggravated certain local conflicts as in the case of the Mamprusi-Kusasi ethnic/chieftaincy conflict in Bawku in the northern part of Ghana. The introduction of party politics in Ghana in the 1950s and the posture of the two major ethnic groups towards the different parties polarized the Bawku community as it heightened already existing differences. Politicians eager to maximize their political fortunes took undue advantage of otherwise local animosities pitching feuding groups, who then became anxious to appropriate political power, against each other.

Thus, through a skillful manipulation of local grievance and disputes, judicious use of threats of punishment and subtle coercion, Nkrumah and the C.P.P. government easily subdued his political opponents including chiefs in the Northeast. By doing so, Nkrumah politicized the Bawku skin dispute in particular as his canning maneuvers systematically undermined the prospects of resolving the impasse. Indeed Nkrumah’s meddling in the Mamprusi-Kusasi affairs created a precedent for subsequent governments of Ghana to make similar biased interventions, which led to ethnic polarization and made the dispute intractable.

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<sup>30</sup>NRG8/3/82 Letter No. UHC/8SF.4/129 from registrar, Upper Region house of chiefs to the Nayiri, 27<sup>th</sup> March 1972.

<sup>31</sup>Ladouceur, 126.

<sup>32</sup>Mumuni Bawumia was among the first to cross carpet to the C.P.P in 1958. See Ladouceur, 168, for details of others who followed suit.

<sup>33</sup>Denis Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946-1960*, (London: Oxford University press, 1964), 410. See also Richard D. Mahoney, *J F K Ordeal in Ghana*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), 175.

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