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Ethnic Identity, Globalization, and Ethnic Conflict in the Northern Region of Ghana: The Case of East Gonja and Kpandai Districts

Tinab Mohammed

Institute for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract:

Ethnic conflicts have become a phenomenal event in the Northern Region of Ghana leading to underdevelopment. These conflicts are attributed to the lingering legacies of colonialism, but for many, especially in the Western popular and academic media, singular historical and internal explanations tend to be offered, assigning the conflicts to either Africa's primordial afflictions of 'tribalism', or the depredations of the continent's proverbial poverty and inequalities, discrimination, authoritarianism and poor governance. This paper therefore attempts to examine the possible causes of these ethnic conflicts within the context of globalization and identity formation. It was realised that the causes of the ethnic conflicts in Northern Region and especially, in the East Gonja and Kpandai districts were ethnic identity, inequality, sense of marginalisation, subordination, and land ownership. These factors collectively or individually led to the frequent ethnic clashes.

Keywords: Ethnic Identity, Globalization, Ethnic Conflict, Ghana

1. Introduction

Since the end of World War II and particularly Cold War, ethnic conflicts have emerged as one of the most pressing security issues in the world (Posen, 1993). According to Saad (1998), those conflicts that have occurred apart from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, have been over internal ethnic issues. Currently, ethnic conflicts span over the world. Typical examples include those in Burma and Sri Lanka in Asia, the former *Union of Soviet Socialist Republics* (USSR) and Yugoslavia in Europe. In the view of Jackson (2007), ethnic conflicts have occurred since the demise of the Cold War in the early 1990s, especially in Africa making it most prone to conflict situation than any other continent. The trend of this ethnic conflict is salient throughout the continent. Africa as a continent has suffered from various kinds of ethnic conflicts. The worse of all these include those in Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo providing the most visible cases (Gurr & Harff, 1994). As noted by Adedeji (1999), Africa continues to be devoured by various types of conflicts. Deng (2005) supported this assertion and concluded that the majority of the sub-Saharan population live in countries that are at conflict within themselves. The end of the Cold War brought a new momentum to the study of ethnic conflict management and resolution. The West African Sub-region for example, has been plagued by intra-state conflicts mostly caused by ethnic differences. Notably among them are the civil wars of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, with negative consequences. Accordingly, many scholars have tried to develop a theoretical approach to the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflict for a long time. Some, like Gurr (1970), Horowitz (1985), Azar (1990), Rothschild (1997), agree that the ethnic conflicts that are experienced in Africa are deep rooted.

Ghana is commonly regarded as one of the most peaceful countries in Africa but the Northern Region of Ghana cannot share this pride because for the past two decades, more than twenty violent ethnic conflicts have occurred (Brukum, 2004). These conflicts have been between the minority and the majority groups. The majority of the violent conflicts in the Northern Region and the case of East Gonja and Kpandai districts, for example, the Gonja-Nawuri conflict of 1992; the Konkomba and their allies against the Gonja in 1992; and the 1994 popular *guinea fowl* war between the Konkomba on one hand and Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja on the other reside in ethnic identification, creates a phenomenon which renders ethnicity as a terrible destructive force (Tinab, 2014). What makes conflicts of a serious concern to many is because of its devastating effects on lives and property. By official counts, the conflicts between Konkomba and Bimoba in 1984, 1986 and 1989 led to the death of about 60 people and others displaced. The Nawuri-Gonja conflict of 1991 left 78 people dead and hundreds wounded. Other conflicts that took heavy toll on lives in the region included the Gonja-Valga conflict of 1980, Konkomba-Nanumba conflict of 1981; Mamprusi-Kusasi conflict of 1992; Gonja-Nawuri conflict of 1992; the Konkomba and their allies against the Gonja in 1992; and the 1994 popular 'guinea fowl conflict' between the Konkomba on one hand and Dagomba, Nanumba and Gonja on the other took at least 2,000 lives, 200,000 internally displaced and about 441 villages got completely destroyed (Brukum, 1995). Conflicts also result in the death arising from malnutrition and infections often outweigh the numbers of people who died due to the violence of conflicts (WHO, 2001).

2. Statement of the Problem

In the East Gonja and Kpandai districts, there is no clear administrative demarcation of social and traditional boundaries. Also, there is overlapping of different ethnic groups in each of the areas creating clashing of interest over simple issues leading to conflict. The main and visible ethnic groups in the two districts include the Gonja, Dagomba, Konkomba, Nawuri, Nchumburu, Kotokoli, Basari, Bator (Ewe) and other minority groups. Ethnic politics has been one of the major sources of social mobilisation for ethnic identity and supremacy.

Historically, the Gonja had been the conquerors of the other ethnic groups mainly because the latter were people with no strong leadership like the former. This background led to the putting of Gonja chiefs in all villages and towns in the then East Gonja district to rule over the other non-centralised ethnic groups. Most of the non-centralised ethnic groups were automatically annexed to the Gonja chiefs. This practice was to ensure that the conquered groups paid their allegiance to the East Gonja overlord, “the Kpembewura” and for easy ruling.

The area is remote without good road networks making it inaccessible. More so, there are no strong and effective national institutions and agents responsible for resolving grievances among people in the area. The absence of credible enforcement mechanisms lead to security dilemmas. These security dilemmas encourage actors to engage in violent acts with the fear of being victimised or suppressed by their opponents. Similarly, this absence encourages the local agents in the communities to mobilise groups to fight in order to satisfy their parochial interest. Not only this, the actors also seek their own violence means of resolving their grievances.

3. Review of Related Literature

Prior to colonial rule, two distinct systems of traditional rule existed in Northern Ghana. These were the highly centralized systems of the Dagomba, Gonja, Nanumba, and Mamprusi, referred to as the “invader tribes” (Stride & Ifeka, 1971; p. 83), and the decentralized systems of the majority of ethnic groups in the north including the Konkomba, Nawuri, Nchumburu, and Basaari. Among the highly centralized tribes, royal dynasties have constituted the locus of power in these societies, and succession to the seat of power is by patrilineal inheritance (Staniland, 1975). Conversely, the decentralized tribes had no single apical head as the locus of political power for the entire ethnic group. This constituted the basis of their being described as “acephalous” (Talton, 2002).

Despite years of coexistence, the two traditional systems of governance remained distinct. During the time of colonial rule in 1899, the need to have control over a large landmass forced British to attempt to streamline and universalize the chieftaincy system which existed before their arrival. This became clear when Irvine, the Provincial Commissioner, South, stated in the handing over notes to his successor in 1909:

As it is impossible to govern the country successfully except through the hands of the chiefs, every effort should be made to strengthen them in their dealings with their people as far as it is compatible with equity and good governance (cited in Staniland, 1975; p. 58).

This statement undoubtedly gave birth to the principle of indirect rule in Northern Ghana. Much of the political structure in which ethnic groups in Northern Ghana interacted under colonial rule was defined by Britain’s indirect rule policies. The Governor, Gordon Guggisberg implemented this policy and made a clear statement that:

Our policy must be to maintain any Paramount chiefs that existed and gradually absorb under these any small communities scattered about.

What we should aim at is that one day the Dagomba, Gonja and the Mamprusi should become strong native states... (cited in Staniland, 1975; p. 58).

From the period of 1930s and 40s, the socioeconomic change that accompanied indirect rule led to an emphasis on ethnicity, or ‘tribe,’ over other identities (Iliffe, 1979; p. 318). A collection of these ‘tribes,’ from the British officials’ view was what comprised African societies, and each ‘tribe’ was unique, mostly isolated and ruled by a single powerful chief. Interestingly, Mamdani (1996) explained that the colonial authorities constructed ethnic identity in Ghana and imposed them on the people through colonial policy. Ironically, while the British were forcing Africans to adjust to an ethnic-based political framework that defined a group’s legal status and its relationships with others as unchanging, they influenced social and political change as Africans attempted to adjust to this imposed political system.

Lentz and Nugent (2000, p. 9) suggested that, as they constructed these polices different from African society, politics, and culture, “the British automatically laid a solid foundation for today’s ethnic identities. They did so by imposing a number of ‘native states’ which they imagined corresponded with established tribal boundaries”. Immediately after the British imposed their power and authority over what they defined as the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, they became aware that what they labelled ‘tribe’ did not reflect the political and social realities that they encountered. Through divide and rule policies, colonial powers based identity on European racial classification and made opposing identities more rigid and unequal (Rubin, 2006).

4. Concept of Ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity has a long and contentious history in the social sciences. According to Davies and Rothschild (1996), ethnicity is the condition of belonging to an ethnic group, the sense of ethnic identity is felt by members of an ethnic community. This definition of ethnicity largely coincides with the concept of an ethnic group. Thomson (2000, p. 58) described an ethnic group as “a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on their history, origin, tradition, kinship ties, cultural uniqueness, and a common language”. Ethnic groups in this sense are a community of people who share cultural and linguistic characteristics including language, history, tradition, myth, and origin. Ethnicity establishes a distinct culture or subculture within which members feel themselves bound together by such commonalities as

history, geographic location, language, norms, traditions, values, and behaviour through which they have a strong sense of ethnic identity and people hood (Thomson, 2000, p. 58).

Horowitz (1985), Azar (1990) and Rothschild (1997) refer to the concept of ethnic conflict as a myth and argue that the root causes of ethnic conflicts do not involve ethnicity alone but also other related social factors such as economic and political. It is further argued that the concept of ethnic conflict is misleading because it leads to an essentialist conclusion that certain groups are doomed to fight each other when in fact the cause of the conflict could be politically motivated. Smith (1992) on his part refers ethnic conflict to a continuum of events which range from the articulation of dissatisfaction, protest, mobilisation, confrontation, sporadic or sustained violence, and civil war or insurrection, in which ethnicity plays a key role.

Once conflict has emerged, it develops further with certain dynamic and intensity. In this case, knowing how conflicts start and their categorisation is crucial because it may provide indications of what might happen next and what can facilitate the conflict management. An ethnic conflict is a conflict between ethnic groups often as a result of ethnic nationalism. Academic explanations of ethnic conflict generally fall into one of three schools of thought: primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist.

Proponents of primordialist accounts of ethnic conflict argue that ethnic groups and nationalities exist because there are traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects such as biological features. The primordialist account depends on the concept of kinship between members of an ethnic group. Horowitz (1985, p. 57) argues that this kinship "makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances". Anthony (2001) notes that the instrumentalist account came to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, a period which ethnic persistence were supposed to have been an effective melting pot. This new theory sought to explain such persistence as the result of the actions of some influential people, who used culture and ethnic identity as a means of organising their people to fight for their right. Under such conditions of culture and ethnic identity, people viewed ethnicity as a means to an end.

Whether ethnicity is a fixed perception or not is not crucial in the view of the instrumentalists. They do not oppose neither that ethnic difference is a part of many conflicts nor that a lot of belligerent human beings believe that they are fighting because of their differences. These scholars perceive ethnic difference as not sufficient to explain conflicts. According to Pul (2003), the disposition of a locale or ethnic group to violence is highest when the structures and systems exclude some ethnic groups from access to power and economic resources.

Again, ethnic elites engage in reconstructing ethnic histories and leading factions in the struggles for or against exclusion in traditional authority arrangements. Also, state neutrality in the conflicts is compromised when ethnic elites on one side of the conflict are able to co-opt state processes and resources for their ethnic agendas and/or influence the crafting of state laws, policies, programmes, actions and/or inactions to reinforce the exclusion of the other group. The presence of all three factors in a locality increases the incidence of violence more than any one of the factors can do alone (Pul, 2003, p. 12). This approach overestimates the role of the elite manipulation of the masses and undervalues social movements and group mobilisation. This assumes the principle of primacy of rational and strategic calculation.

Korostelina (2007), one of the proponents of the constructivists, argued that social identities are socially constructed phenomena influenced by the processes of existing social structures. It is generated, confirmed and transformed in the process of interactions between groups and individuals and reflect their perceptions and behaviours. For Volkan (2006), ethnicity is a mode of thought and not a category in nature and has no existence outside of inter-ethnic relations. This is the constructionist view of culture which sees all social phenomena as imagined realities which can be constructed by the elites to achieve political and economic aims. This view rejects the idea that ethnicity is strongly associated with the primordial feeling of emotional attachment to blood ties and bonds of common culture, and identity (Thomson, 2000).

Croucher (2004) argues that ethnicity is a constructed identity but it is constructed on the appeal to primordial sentiments of belonging. This, she contends, takes place under specific circumstances and can only be understood through a careful examination of those circumstances. In the case of the Konkomba, Gonja, Nawuri, Nchmburu and their neighbours, it is not only the perceived marginalisation, political and economic exclusion that serves as a common unifying force, but also stories of common origin, culture and history (Tinab, 2014). Talton (2010), however, views the emergence of a Konkomba ethnicity from a constructionist perspective by arguing that the emergence of the Konkomba ethnic group was as a result of their subordination under the Dagomba Naa by the British system of indirect rule. In their attempt to gain their independence, the Konkomba were pushed beyond lineage and clan politics toward a unified Konkomba ethnicity.

Even though the British colonial policy in Northern Ghana laid so much emphasis on ethnicity than other forms of identities; they did not create the ethnic groups in the Northern Region especially the East Gonja and Kpandai districts. What the British did was to construct rigid social relations between the centralised and non-centralised ethnic groups by empowering the former and marginalising the latter. By this, the fluidity and flexibility involved in ethnic relations was replaced with a more rigid and less negotiable relationship. This arrangement was continued by the post-colonial governments making ethnicity the only avenue by which state resources and political power is acquired (Lentz & Nugent, 2000). Thus access to political power and economic resources came to be based on ethnicity.

With increased competition for scarce resources, ethnic identity formation has intensified and the struggle between ethnic groups has become more violent. Sen (2006) contends that identity can be a potential source of conflict. The presumption that people are inherently different on account of religion or culture leads to formation of identity around one category. Identity with one group leads to the exclusion of others and forms the basis for deprivation, marginalisation and poverty which ignites latent conflicts. This is a powerful weapon which can be used for the brutalisation of others. Volkan (2006) also links ethnic identity to conflicts by arguing that when ethnic groups define and distinguish their groups from others, they end up developing some kind of prejudice for their own group against the other group. They tend to idealize their groups' values and suspend critical reasoning which can be a serious source of conflict.

Cultural identity defines people's cultural bonding, the group to which they belong. Within mobilisation tactics cultural identity is usually portrayed as a fixed characteristic, which must be defended against 'others' who are generally viewed as competing for the same resources, power or status. Most contemporary definitions of identity denote a move from bounded or fixed objects in the natural world namely that identity (singular) is essential, fundamental, unitary and unchanging to the idea that identities (plural) are constructed and reconstructed through socio-historical actions (Lapid, 1996; Kaufman, 2006). Hence identities are emergent and constructed not fixed and natural; contested and polymorphic not unitary and single; and interactive and process-like not static (Kaufman, 2006). It is generally found that for effective mobilisation of cultural diversity in conflict situations, leaders emphasise the fundamental and unchanging aspects of culture, which can be simplified and contrasted more easily with other cultural communities.

Horowitz (1985) in analysing ethnic conflict combines primordialist and instrumentalist elements. One of the most crucial elements of the analysis is the role of self-esteem that individuals derive from seeing members of their ethnic group succeed in business and, especially, in politics. This allows group leaders, who view ethnicity instrumentally to mobilise ethnic support whether in the form of votes for ethnic parties or participation in violent confrontations. The view that group self-esteem and considerations are important in ethnic conflict seems extremely plausible.

5. Ethnic Identity and Globalization

Ethnic identity is the product of globalization and that rather than destroying cultural differences; globalization has been perhaps the most significant force in creating and proliferating cultural identity (Kaufman, 2006). As interactions between groups intensify and people become more aware of their neighbours, they begin to emphasize their uniqueness. Thus globalization gives rise to the acquisition and maintenance of group identity. Today, globalization is giving rise to all forms of identity formation and seen as the force producing identity rather than obliterating it. How people view themselves against others in this period of high globalization has become important making the acquisition and maintenance of identity both vital and problematic.

Tomlinson (2002) viewed ethnic identity as much more a product of globalization as globalization distributes the institutional features of modernity across all cultures and produces identity where none existed. Identity itself is a contested term. According to Ojeili and Hayden (2006), identity is unstable and fractured, involving several shifting factors. This is because identity as 'peoples' source of meaning and experience' about themselves does not develop in a vacuum (Tomlinson, 2002). It is developed in relation to others and therefore how a group of people perceive themselves is to a large extent determined by the knowledge about others. People begin to emphasize their differences when they become more aware of others and these differences are mostly expressed in the form of reasserting group identity through ethnic mobilisation. Identity is therefore a socially constructed category based on perceived difference from others (Sen, 2008). It is after having become aware of other people's condition that people begin to assert their uniqueness and the necessity to protect it.

Furthermore, there are several categories around which identity can be constructed but the importance of a particular category around which identity is built depends very much on the social circumstances (Sen, 2008). In Northern Ghana the most dominant category in identity formation is ethnicity. Horowitz (2001) supports this and defines ethnicity as a categorisation characterised by a feeling of a common ancestry and shared culture which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Thus, an important element is not only the objective fact of common blood ties but also a 'subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of tradition, or because of past events' (Croucher, 2004, p. 117).

The concepts of globalization and identity formation seem to depict an awkward combination (Talton, 2003). Increased interactions and speeding up of social relations lead to the distribution of western lifestyles, taste and cultures imply that the world would be moving towards homogenization and cultural uniformity. It presupposes therefore that cultural differences would disappear and give way to cultural homogenization and standardization, which will bring about peaceful coexistence. However, globalization is far from bringing about uniformity and cultural standardization. Inda and Rosaldo (2008) saw globalization as not a uniform process of exportation of western ideas and culture but it encompasses both homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies.

Globalization engenders cooperation, integration, conflict including fragmentation, inclusion and exclusion, convergence and divergence, order and disorder (Held & McGrew, 2000, p. 7). This means that globalization produces contradictory outcomes. It therefore, implies that it will be a mistake to associate globalization with the end of local identity formation and cultural diversity. Increased interaction does not mean reduced cultural diversity. Indeed, globalization could just as well increase cultural pluralism because by significantly influencing the rate, dynamics, and global access to flow of information, globalization could build up a social infrastructure for the emergence of identity formation (Das & Kleinman, 2001). Following this conceptualisation of globalization, it is easy to argue that globalization generates local identity formation rather than obliterate them.

The link between globalization and ethnic conflicts has been put forward by Chua (2003). The thrust of the argument is that, the current waves of globalization conceptualised in terms of liberalisation and democratisation are increasing ethnic violence in most of the developing world. It is further argued that pervasive poverty, market liberalisation and democratisation repeatedly catalysed ethnic conflicts in highly predictable manner, with negative effects, and destruction of markets and democracy themselves. This theory is based on the premise that globalization breeds inequality along ethnic lines and engenders ethnic hatred for rich ethnic minorities. Increased democratisation makes latent conflicts manifest since people are now free to express their dissatisfaction.

According to Chua (2003), during authoritative regimes, hostilities between ethnic groups are suppressed which then erupt into violent conflicts with a shift towards democratisation. With increasing democratisation, and periodic elections, politicians with political ambitions are likely to instigate the majority ethnic group against the rich minority through the use of hate narratives. The conflicts generated by this process are referred to as 'globalization wars' because they are directed towards gaining state power (Tomlinson, 2002). This kind of reasoning seems to contrast the liberal peace theory which contends that increased

democratisation and international trade reduce conflict propensities. But it must be pointed out that the liberal peace theory focuses on cross border conflicts which are different from ethnic conflicts we experienced in the Northern Region of Ghana (Tinab, 2014).

While Chua's theory of globalization provides a powerful framework for understanding the Konkomba, Nawuri, and Nchumburu insurgency in the East Gonja and Kpandai districts, few observations have to be made. First, the case diverges from globalization wars, in that it was not a case of rebellion against the state, but rather a mobilisation against another ethnic group to demand equal access to political and economic resources in the region. Second, the Konkomba, Nawuri, and Nchumburu do not dominate their centralised neighbours economically and therefore even though they are regarded as minorities, they are not richer than their centralised neighbours.

Notwithstanding the above observations, however, the theory is still applicable in this case since it focuses on identity formation which centres on a feeling of a common problem. For the Konkomba, this is their perceived marginalised position in the region vis-a-vis their centralised neighbours which generates a feeling of hatred against their centralised neighbours and the desire to unite to demand their rights. Moreover, Tomlinson (2002) has argued that a far more prevalent form of globalization conflicts in the world today is the demand for greater share of resources and increased political participation instead of separatist and anti-statist mobilisation (OJeili & Hayden, 2006). The Konkomba, Nawuri, Gonja conflicts can therefore, be placed squarely in this category of globalization conflicts and analyzed from such a perspective.

6. Conceptual Framework for Ethnic Conflict

Developing conceptual framework for the study of ethnic conflict is necessary, so that we may get a better understanding of why ethnic conflicts continue to exist. This would help to create a more comprehensive basis for peace-building and post-conflict development in ethnically divided societies in a country. In literature, some competing theories such as primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist views were used to explain the causes of ethnic conflicts. Jalali and Lipset (1996) argue that, given the variety of ethnic conflicts and their dynamic and fluid qualities, no single factor can provide a comprehensive explanation and resolution to such phenomenon.

It is not easy attempting to develop a comprehensive approach for understanding a phenomenon that manifests in various contexts across the globe. Rather than offering a comprehensive theory of ethnic conflict, it is better to explore some of the existing explanations and approaches and the ways and extent to which these approaches are complementary in helping to construct a broader conceptual framework for understanding the complexities of violent inter-ethnic conflict. For the purpose of this study, a conceptual framework proposed by Blagojevic (2004) for understanding violent ethnic conflict that combines the various approaches is used.

Blagojevic (2004) argue that ethnic conflict occurs when a particular set of factors and conditions converge: a major structural crisis; presence of historical memories of inter-ethnic grievances; institutional factors that promote ethnic intolerance; manipulation of historical memories by political entrepreneurs to evoke emotions such as fear, resentment and hate toward the "other"; and an inter-ethnic competition over resources and rights. A sequentially ordered chain of causality among these factors and the relationship between each theory and the factors that contribute to ethnic conflict is illustrated in Figure 1.

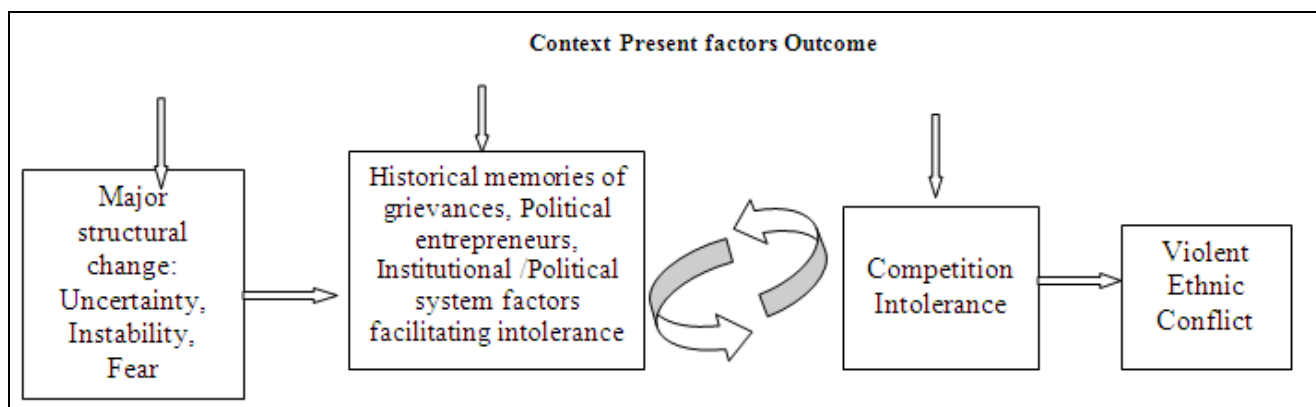


Figure 1: Causes of ethnic conflict
Source: Blagojevi (2004).

Though each ethnic conflict has its own unique characteristics and in different contexts, some of these elements will be more prominent than others, but all of them lead to conditions necessary for ethnic conflict to occur. The primordialist approach from the framework helps in explaining the role of emotions and the conflict potential of ethnicity. The institutional, political entrepreneurs and competition over resources approaches explain how the interaction of institutional and political factors with ethnic emotions leads to ethnification, ethnic intolerance, competition, and eventually violent conflict.

Ethnically diverse societies carry various degrees of conflict potential. Ethnic emotions, rooted in hatred historical memories of grievances, are at the core of conflict potential. Ethnicity, as Horowitz (1985) argues, embodies an element of emotional intensity that can be readily aroused when the group's interests are thought to be at stake. When there is a sudden major structural change in a community of diverse ethnic groups it may lead to political and institutional disarrangements. When these institutional

mechanisms are no longer in place, it will create a context of instability and uncertainty about the political, social, and economic future of the communities. A situation of this nature facilitates a manifestation of emotional antagonisms among various ethnic groups (David & Rothchild, 1996).

Political entrepreneurs, in their quest for power, mobilize ethnic constituencies by promoting inter-ethnic animosities using the rhetorical weapons of fear, blame, and hate. This results in an inter-ethnic competition over scarce resources and rights, which is accompanied by a reconstruction of social categories of inclusion and exclusion, ethnification and ethnic intolerance (Murat, 1997).

The primordialist approach from the framework helps explain the role of emotions in ethnic conflict and the conflict potential of ethnicity. While ethnic emotions appear to be primordial, they are a socially and politically constructed reality drawn from the historical memories of past injustices and grievances. Beverly (1998) notes that institutions play important roles in regulating the level of potential ethnic conflict and ethnicity. Institution either facilitates or obstructs inter-group cooperation. Furthermore, whether or not identity politics turns into violent conflict depends on the functioning of state institutions. This means that where identity politics is practiced, states' institutions can channel it into peaceful political competition as long as they can make credible commitments to shape and uphold agreements made among culturally defined political actors.

Explaining the framework, the instability and uncertainty that result from a major structural change and the institutional inability to regulate inter-ethnic relations provides a perfect condition for conflict. This allows political entrepreneurs to manipulate ethnic emotions in order to mobilize groups for their own political purposes. Politicians exploit ethnic differences by drawing upon historical memories grievances, injustice and "whip up" hatred in order to gain or strengthen their power. The dynamic that develops between political entrepreneurs and their followers causes an inter-ethnic security dilemma.

Kaufman (1996) explains this situation that, as belligerent leaders stoke mass hostility; hostile masses support belligerent leaders, and both together threaten other groups, creating a security dilemma which in turn encourages even more mass hostility and leadership belligerence. Political entrepreneurs manipulate fears and uncertainties of ethnic groups they represent and are able to awaken a consciousness of common grievances and a desire to rectify these wrongs. They help create and reinforce ethnic polarisation in the society. This conceptual framework is used to support the study.

7. Methodology

The qualitative approach was used for this study. In the view of Silverman (2006) qualitative research design include analysis of words and images rather than numbers, observation rather than experiment, meaning, behaviour and hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis testing. Qualitative methods allows a researcher to study selected themes and events into detail and effectively. The case study approach was employed. Yin (2003) identifies case study research to be the best strategy if the research questions are explanatory, when the research is on contemporary issue and when behavioural events within the research environment occurs within a real world context and outside the control of the researcher. A case study is empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in a natural setting when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not easily understood.

The target population for this study included the chiefs, opinion leaders, youth leaders, governmental and non-governmental agencies interested in peace building and development. Most of these people might have first-hand information relevant to the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The rationale for the choice of the sample technique was to select respondents who are abreast with relevant information and knowledge in the issue under study. The sampling was done based on certain strategies. These were theory-based and critical case sampling techniques. The theory-based was used to select respondents on the basis of their knowledge in ethnic conflict issues. Critical case sampling was used to select most important sites and localities that could yield information which would have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge (Patton, 1990). This method permits logical generalisation and maximum application of information.

The main sources of data for the study were primary and secondary sources. With regard to the primary data, interview guides were used to collect data from respondents (chiefs, opinion leaders, youth leaders and leaders of civil society organisations). For the secondary data, relevant documents, books, journals, internet search, libraries, publications were depended on for more detailed information. The secondary data provided the researchers with more information on the issue under study. In-depth interview guides were used to interview the respondents. Secondary documents were also reviewed to make up any differences that might have occurred in the process of the data collection. Written materials and other documents from organisational, clinical, or programme records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries, letters were used. The contents, case and inductive analyzes were adopted in organising the data for analysis. The content analysis was used to code, identify patterns, themes, categorize patterns, and classify the data. Care was taken to notice convergence and divergence in coding and classifying. Case analysis was used to organise the data. This involved organising the data by specific cases, individuals, groups, sites, and communities for in-depth study and comparison. The case analysis allowed the researcher to understand each case as a unique, holistic entity. Each case represented and was understood as an idiosyncratic manifestation of the evaluation phenomenon of interest.

8. Findings

Most of the violence conflicts experienced in East Gonja and Kpandai districts are intimately related to the common well-known challenges of scarce resources, poverty, marginalisation, bad governance, and weak states mechanisms in managing and resolving conflicts. Generally, the root causes of these conflicts do not lend themselves to one factor. There are varied factors which led to these unending ethnic conflicts. Globalization, ethnic identity and politics of misinformation spread through the mass media all

contributed to the conflicts. Educated elites and politicians are not spared from being one of the causes of these ethnic conflicts. From the interview, one of the respondents said:

We (Gonja) are the traditional leaders in this area. I hope you are aware that these people are strangers here. What I mean is that we are the indigenous people who own this land and 'they' (Konkomba, Nawuri, Nchumburu) are strangers and settlers and suppose to respect and pay allegiance to us in all matters. But, they continue to disregard our traditional authority and status of late without any tangible reason.

From the narrative, it is realised that the major claim made against the acephalous groups, especially the Konkomba was that they continually disregarded their centralised neighbours' traditional authority and status and refused to pay allegiance to the Gonja chiefs. Accordingly, the centralised group felt that their authority has been undermined by the non-centralized groups. They saw the non-centralised groups to be ungrateful and rebellious in their actions. The finding showed that there has not been any history of dispute between the Konkomba and the Gonja, both co-existed peacefully for long. One of the documents analyzed reveals a similar findings to this. In the document, it was realised that notwithstanding the issue of misunderstanding between the acephalous groups and the centralised group, both had lived happily in the past. It was therefore unpleasing for them to be at conflict with each other especially the Konkomba and the Gonja. What led to this probably was the spilt over effects of the Konkomba and Dagomba, Konkomba and Nanumba long standing ethnic conflicts over land ownerships and paramount chieftaincy. History has it that the Konkomba and Dagomba have engaged in several ethnic clashes before the 1994 conflict which engulfed all the Northern Region.

For their part, the acephalous groups especially the Konkomba argued that they had suffered long-term exploitation and subjugation by the centralised Gonja group and their chiefs. They have always been referred to as settlers. This sense of marginalisation and subordination led to ethnic clashes. In rejecting their neighbours' claims that they disregarded their authority and status, the acephalous groups' leadership insisted that they were only protecting their interests and rights as Ghanaian citizens and nothing more than that. This argument sought to present the conflict between the centralised and non-centralised groups as conflicts of insubordination and rebelliousness. The Konkomba, one of the acephalous groups, argued that they do not contest ownership of land in the East Gonja and Kpandai districts as it is the case of Dagbon (Yendi) where Konkomba are at war with Dagomba over land ownership and paramount chieftaincy. The Konkomba agreed that they migrated from Saboba to the Gonja-land and do not contest for any ownership of land in Gonja-land. But, rather they have been oppressed, discriminated against, and marginalised by their neighbours for long. According to them, continually referring to them as settlers and strangers on their land was unpleasing to them. In an interview with one of the Konkomba community leaders, he gave the following:

You see my son; we are all the same people living together for long time. The problem is that we are always and most often being referred to as 'bush animals' or people who are uncivilised. All these we do not mind, but we have not been given the opportunity to express ourselves freely. Most often than not, we are not recognised by our neighbours. For that matter, we do not have legal chiefs with authority to adjudicate our cases. To the best, we only have community elders and youth leaders. Because of this our voices are not always heard in national issues. To even complicate the issue, we are not represented at the regional and national house of chiefs which is one of the medium through which both national and local developmental issues are discussed. We do not resort to violence but, when it happens that way it is always difficult to tell... that is how we have been treated.

Relating this to literature, it confirmed the work of Pul (2003) who contended that, the disposition of a locale or ethnic group to violence is highest when the structures and systems of local chieftaincy institutions exclude some ethnic groups from access to power and economic resources. Again, ethnic elites, politicians and ethnic youth associations' leaders engage in reconstructing ethnic histories and leading factions in the struggles for or against exclusion in traditional authority arrangements. Such situations breed conflicts in the society. This result is consistent with Scarborough's (1998) work when he pointed to the fact that in situations where existing structures in a society are tilted in favour of a particular group to the disadvantage of others, and when people find it difficult to identify with political and economic ideas of the society, violent communal conflict is likely to emerge and escalate when not properly managed. The ethnic conflicts in the East Gonja and Kpandai districts could be attributed to this condition whereby the existing structures do not favour the minority groups. Also, when the minority ethnic groups or the non-centralised ethnic groups felt they do not get access to power and resources in the community they resort to violence means of acquiring that.

The Nawuri and the Nchumburu on the other hand, had argued that they are indigenes in the area they currently occupied. They are of the view that the Gonja usurped their authority. For them, especially the Nawuri, Kpandai belongs to them and that they are first settlers there before the arrival of any other ethnic group including the Gonja. So they do not see the reason why they should be referred to as strangers on their own land. The Nchumburu also held the same view with the Nawuri. To consolidate this assertion, one of the Nawuri chiefs had this to say:

We are not strangers as the stories have always been told. The Gonja and any other ethnic group are much aware that we are the first settlers. Yes, it is true that we have been ruled by Gonja for some period. That was then. But, the fact still remained that we are the first settlers and for that matter owners of this land in Kpandai. We are not fighting with them for Kpembai and Salaga which is their land; we need to reclaim our lost glory. This kind of insubordination cannot continue.

The foregoing argument indicated that each of the ethnic groups in the East Gonja and Kpandai districts see themselves as unique.

9. Conclusion

The causes of the ethnic conflicts in the area can be seen as ethnic identity, inequality, sense of marginalisation, subordination, and land ownership. Naturally, the root causes of the disputes between these ethnic groups in the area run deeper than ethnic identity, inequality and land ownership. When people begin to feel that they have not been recognised and treated well in the society they begin to resist the authority in the society leading to violence. In such situations, people begin to identify themselves

as one around certain lines. The work of Sen (2006) and Volkan (2006) supported this and linked ethnic identity to conflicts. The causes of the ethnic conflicts in the East Gonja and Kpandai districts are linked to colonial legacy of indirect rule, breakdown of states' structures, poverty, inequality, discrimination among others. However, the awareness of this has been facilitated by globalization and ethnic identity creating the sense and feelings of marginalisation. Politicians, educated elites and youth association leaders in the communities often worsen the issues of ethnic conflicts.

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